

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

*The*  
HUSBAND'S  
STORY

LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

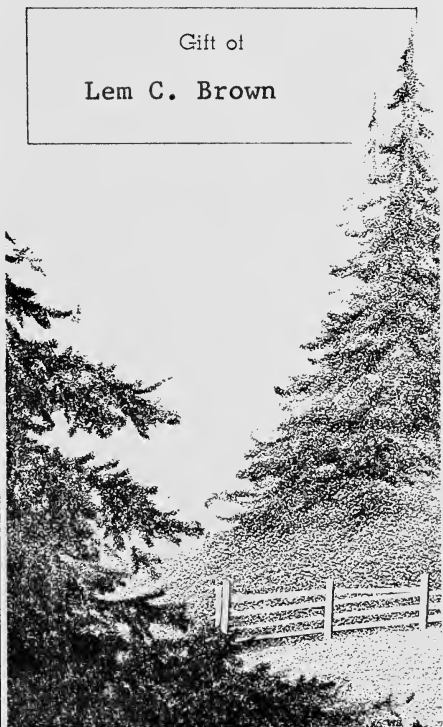


SANTA CRUZ



Gift of

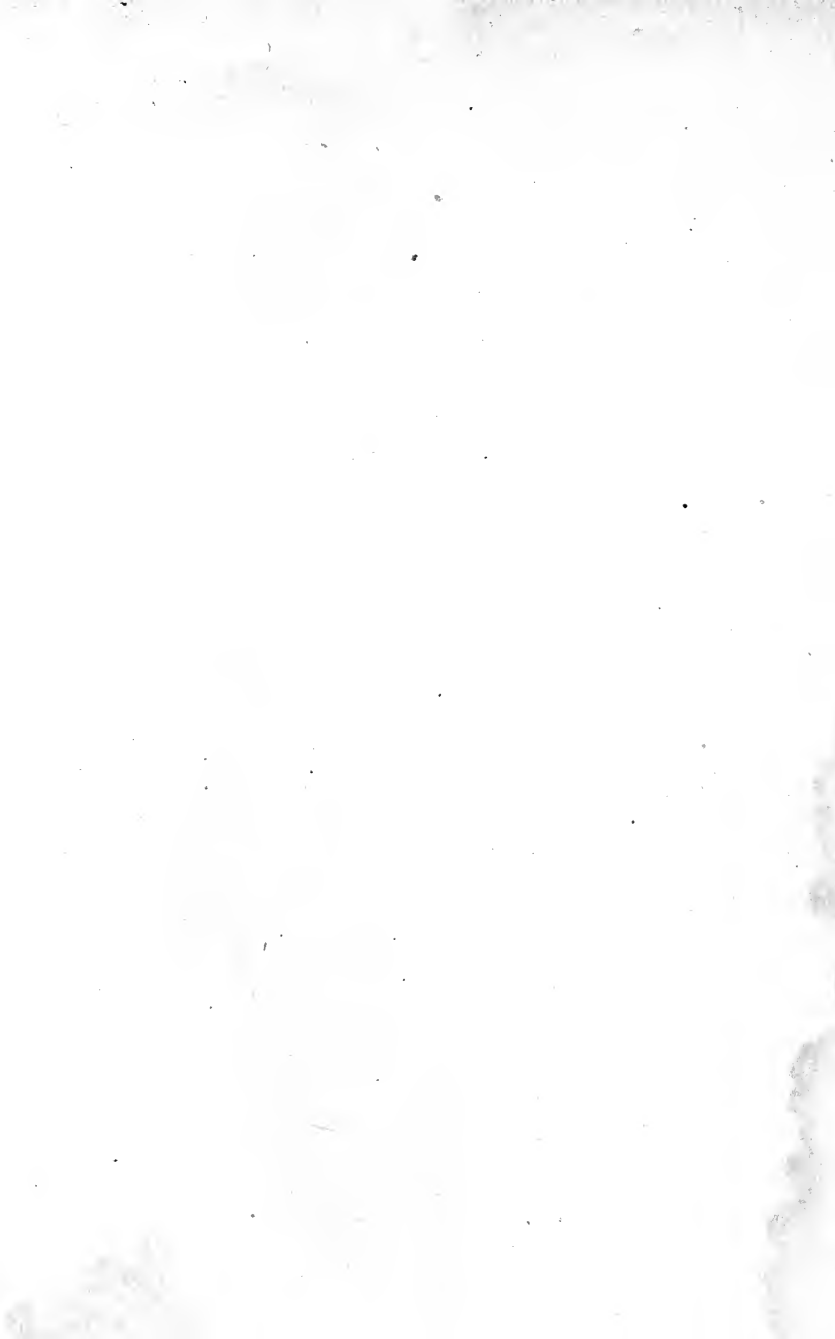
Lem C. Brown



.. THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ..



SANTA CRUZ







*The*  
**HUSBAND'S STORY**



# The Husband's Story

## A NOVEL

BY  
DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

AUTHOR OF  
THE FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF  
JOSHUA CRAIG, OLD WIVES FOR NEW  
THE SECOND GENERATION, ETC.



NEW YORK  
GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

*Published September, 1910*

Printed in the United States of America

John Brown

PS  
3531  
H5  
H84

# THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

## WHY

SEVERAL years ago circumstances thrust me into a position in which it became possible for the friend who figures in these pages as Godfrey Loring to do me a favor. He, being both wise and kindly, never misses a good chance to put another under obligations. He did me the favor. I gratefully, if reluctantly, acquiesced. Now, after many days, he collects. When you shall have read what follows, you may utterly reject my extenuating plea that any and every point of view upon life is worthy of attention, even though it serve only to confirm us in our previous ideas and beliefs. You may say that I should have repudiated my debt, should have refused to edit and publish the manuscript he confided to me. You may say that the general racial obligation to mankind—and to womankind—takes precedence over a private and personal obligation. Unfortunately I happen to be not of the philanthropic temperament. My sense of the personal is strong; my sense of the general weak—that is to say, weak in comparison. If “Loring” had been within reach, I think I should have gone to him and pleaded for release. But as luck will have it, he is off yachting, to peep about in the remote

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

inlets and islets of Australasia and the South Seas for several years.

To aggravate my situation, in the letter accompanying the manuscript, after several pages of the discriminating praise most dear to a writer's heart, he did me the supreme honor of saying that in his work he had "striven to copy as closely as might be your style and your methods—to help me to the hearing I want and to lighten your labors as editor." I assure him and the public that in any event I should have done little editing of his curious production beyond such as a proof-reader might have found necessary. As it is, I have done practically no editing at all. In form and in substance, from title to finis, the work is his. I am merely its sponsor—and in circumstances that would forbid me were I disposed to qualify my sponsorship with even so mild a disclaimer as reluctance.

Have I said more than a loyal friend should? If so, on the other hand, have I not done all that a loyal friend could?

## I

I AM tempted to begin with our arrival in Fifth Avenue, New York City, in the pomp and circumstance befitting that region of regal splendor. I should at once catch the attention of the women; and my literary friends tell me that to make any headway with a story in America it is necessary to catch the women, because the men either do not read books at all or read only what they hear the women talking about. And I know well—none knows better—that our women of the book-buying class, and probably of all classes, love to amuse their useless idleness with books that help them to dream of wasting large sums of money upon luxuries and extravagances, upon entertaining grand people in grand houses and being entertained by them. They tell me, and I believe it, that our women abhor stories of middle-class life, abhor truth-telling stories of any kind, like only what assures them that the promptings of their own vanities and sentimental shams are true.

But patience, gentle reader, you with the foolish, chimera-haunted brain, with the silly ideas of life, with the ignorance of human nature including your own self, with the love of sloppy and tawdry clap trap. Patience, gentle reader. While I shall begin humbly in the social scale, I shall not linger there long. I shall pass

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

on to the surroundings of grandeur that entrance your snobbish soul. You will soon smell only fine perfumes, only the aromas of food cooked by expensive chefs. You will sit in drawing-rooms, lie in bedrooms as magnificent as the architects and decorators and other purveyors to the very rich have been able to concoct. You will be tasting the fine savors of fashionable names and titles recorded in Burke's and the "Almanach de Gotha." Patience, gentle reader, with your box of caramels and your hair in curl papers and your household work undone—patience! A feast awaits you.

There has been much in the papers these last few years about the splendid families we—my wife and I—came of. Some time ago one of the English dukes—a nice chap with nothing to do and a quaint sense of humor—assembled on his estate for a sort of holiday and picnic all the members of his ancient and proud family who could be got together by several months of diligent search. It was a strange and awful throng that covered the lawns before the ducal castle on the appointed day. There was a handful of fairly presentable, more or less prosperous persons. But the most of the duke's cousins, near and remote, were tramps, bartenders, jail birds, women of the town, field hands male and female, sewer cleaners, chimney sweeps, needlewomen, curates, small shopkeepers, and others of the species that are as a stench unto delicate, aristocratic nostrils. The duke was delighted with his picnic, pronounced it a huge success. But then His Grace had a sense of humor and was not an American aristocrat.

All this by way of preparation for the admission



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

that the branch of the Loring family from which I come and the branch of the Wheatlands family to which the girl I married belongs were far from magnificent, were no more imposing then, well, than the families of any of our American aristocrats. Like theirs, our genealogical tree, most imposingly printed and bound and proudly exhibited on a special stand in the library of our New York palace—that genealogical tree, for all its air of honesty, for all its documentary proofs, worm-eaten and age-stained, was like an artificial palm bedded in artificial moss. The truth is, aristocracy does not thrive in America, but only the pretense of it, and that must be kept alive by constant renewals. Both here and abroad I am constantly running across traces of illegitimacy, substitution, and other forms of genealogical flim-flam. But let that pass. Whoever is or is not aristocratic, certainly Godfrey Loring and Edna Wheatlands are not—or, rather, *were* not.

My father kept a dejected little grocery in Passaic, N. J. He did not become a “retired merchant and capitalist” until I was able to retire and capitalize him. Edna’s father was— No, you guess wrong. Not a butcher, but—an undertaker! . . . Whew! I am glad to have these shameful secrets “off the chest,” as they say in the Bowery. He—this Wheatlands, undertaker to the poor and near-poor of the then village of Passaic—was a tall, thin man, with snow-white hair and a smooth, gaunt, gloomy face and the best funeral air I have ever seen. Edna has long since forgotten him; she has an admirable ability absolutely to forget anything she may for whatever reason deem it inconvenient to re-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

member. What an aid to conscience is such a quality! But I have not forgotten old Weeping Willy Wheatlands, and I shall not forget him. It was he who loaned me my first capital, the one that— But I must not anticipate.

In those days Passaic was a lowly and a dreary village. Its best was cheap enough; its poorest was wretchedly squalid. The “seat” of the Lorings and the “seat” of the Wheatlands stood side by side on the mosquito beset banks of the river—two dingy frame cottages, a story and a half in height, two rooms deep. We Lorings had no money, for my father was an honest, innocent soul with a taste for talking what he thought was politics, though in fact he knew no more of the realities of politics, the game of pull Dick pull Devil for licenses to fleece a “free, proud and intelligent people”—he knew no more of that reality than—than the next honest soul you may hear driveling on that same subject. We had no money, but “Weeping Willie” had plenty—and saved it, blessings on him! I hate to think where I should be now, if he hadn’t hoarded! So, while our straightened way of living was compulsory, that of the Wheatlands was not. But this is unimportant; the main point is both families lived in the same humble way.

If I thought “gentle reader” had patience and real imagination—and, yes, the real poetic instinct—I should give her an inventory of the furniture of those two cottages, and of the meager and patched draperies of the two Monday wash lines, as my mother and Edna’s mother—and Edna, too, when she grew big enough—

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

decorated them, the while shrieking gossip back and forth across the low and battered board fence. But I shall not linger. It is as well. Those memories make me sad—put a choke in my throat and a mist before my eyes. Why? If you can't guess, I could not in spoiling ten reams of paper explain it to you. One detail only, and I shall hasten on. Both families lived humbly, but we not quite so humbly as the Wheatlands family, because my mother was a woman of some neatness and energy while Ma Wheatlands was at or below the do-easy, slattern human average. *We* had our regular Saturday bath—in the wash tub. *We* did not ever eat off the stove. And while we were patched we were rarely ragged.

In those days—even in those days—Edna was a “scrapper.” They call it an “energetic and resolute personality” now; it was called “scrappy” then, and scrappy it was. When I would be chopping wood or lugging in coal, so occupied that I did not dare pause, she would sit on the fence in her faded blue-dotted calico, and how she would give it to me! She knew how to say the thing that made me wild with the rage a child is ashamed to show. Yes, she loved to tease me, perhaps—really, I hope—because she knew I, in the bottom of my heart, loved to be teased by her, to be noticed in any way. And mighty pretty she looked then, with her mop of yellowish brown hair and her big golden brown eyes and her little face, whose every feature was tilted to the angle that gives precisely the most fascinating expression of pretty pertness, of precocious intelligence, or of devil-may-care audacity. She has always been a

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

pretty woman, has Edna, and always will be, even in old age, I fancy. Her beauty, like her health, like that strong, supple body of hers, was built to last. What is the matter with the generations coming forward now? Why do they bloom only to wither? What has sapped their endurance? Are they brought up too soft? Is it the food? Is it the worn-out parents? Why am I, at forty, younger in looks and in strength and in taste for life than the youths of thirty? Why is Edna, not five years my junior, more attractive physically than girls of twenty-five or younger?

But she was only eight or nine at the time of which I am writing. And she was fond of me then—really fond of me, though she denied it furiously when the other children taunted, and though she was always jeering at me, calling me awkward and homely. I don't think I was notably either the one or the other, but for her to say so tended to throw the teasers off the track and also kept me in humble subjection. I knew she cared, because when we played kissing games she would never call me out, would call out every other boy, but if I called any other girl she would sulk and treat me as badly as she knew how. Also, while she had nothing but taunts and sarcasms for me she was always to be found in the Wheatlands' back yard near the fence or on it whenever I was doing chores in our back yard.

After two years in the High School I went to work in the railway office as a sort of assistant freight clerk. She kept on at school, went through the High School, graduated in a white dress with blue ribbons, and then sat down to wait for a husband. Her father and mother

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

were sensible people. Heaven knows they had led a hard enough life to have good sense driven into them. But the tradition—the lady-tradition—was too strong for them. They were not ashamed to work, themselves. They would have been both ashamed and angry had it been suggested to them that their two boys should become idlers. But they never thought of putting their daughter to work at anything. After she graduated and became a young lady, she was not compelled—would hardly have been permitted—to do housework or sewing. You have seen the potted flower in the miserable tenement window—the representative of the life that neither toils nor spins, but simply exists in idle beauty. That potted bloom concentrates all the dreams, all the romantic and poetic fancies of the tenement family. I suppose Edna was some such treasured exotic possession to those toil-twisted old parents of hers. They wanted a flower in the house.

Well, they had it. She certainly was a lovely girl, far too lovely to be spoiled by work. And if ever there was a scratch or a stain on those beautiful white hands of hers, it assuredly was not made by toil. She took music lessons— Music lessons! How much of the ridiculous, pathetic gropings after culture is packed into those two words. Beyond question, everyone ought to know something about music; we should all know something about everything, especially about the things that peculiarly stand for civilization—science and art, literature and the drama. But how foolishly we are set at it! Instead of learning to understand and to appreciate music, we are taught to “beat the box” in a feeble, clumsy fash-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ion, or to screech or whine when we have no voice worth the price of a single lesson. Edna took I don't know how many lessons a week for I don't know how many years. She learned nothing about music. She merely learned to strum on the piano. But, after all, the lessons attained their real object. They made Edna's parents and Edna herself and all the neighbors feel that she was indeed a lady. She could not sew. She could not cook. She hadn't any knowledge worth mention of any practical thing—therefore, had no knowledge at all; for, unless knowledge is firmly based upon and in the practical, it is not knowledge but that worst form of ignorance, misinformation. She didn't know a thing that would help her as woman, wife, or mother. But she could play the piano!

Some day some one will write something true on the subject of education. You remember the story of the girl from Lapland who applied for a place as servant in New York, and when they asked her what she could do, she said, "I can milk the reindeer."

I never hear the word education that I don't think of that girl. One half of the time spent at school, to estimate moderately, and nine tenths of the time spent in college class rooms is given to things about as valuable to a citizen of this world as the Lap girl's "education" to a New York domestic. If anyone tells you that those valueless things are culture, tell him that only an ignorance still becalmed in the dense mediæval fog would talk such twaddle; tell him that science has taught us what common sense has always shown, that there is no beauty divorced from use, that beauty is simply the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

perfect adaptation of the thing to be used to the purpose for which it is to be used. I am a business man, not a smug, shallow-pated failure teaching in an antiquated college. I abhor the word culture, as I abhor the word gentleman or the word lady, because of the company into which it has fallen. So, while I eagerly disclaim any taint of "culture," I insist that I know what I'm talking about when I talk of education. And if I had not been too good-natured, my girl— But I must keep to the story. "Gentle reader" wants a story; he—or she—does not want to try to think.

It was pleasant to my ignorant ears to hear Edna playing sonatas and classical barcaroles and dead marches and all manner of loud and difficult pieces. Such sounds, issuing from the humble—and not too clean—Wheatlands house gave it an atmosphere of aristocracy, put tone into the whole neighborhood, elevated the Wheatlands family like a paper collar on the calico shirt of a farm hand. If we look at ourselves rightly, we poor smattering seekers after a little showy knowledge of one kind or another—a dabble of French, a dabble of Latin or Greek, a sputter of woozy so-called philosophy—how like the paper-collared farm hand we are, how like the Hottentot chief with a plug hat atop his naked brown body.

But Edna pleased me, fully as much as she pleased herself, and that is saying a great deal. I wouldn't have had her changed in the smallest particular. I was even glad she could get rid of her freckles—fascinating little beauty spots sprinkled upon her tip-tilted little nose!

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

She was not so fond of me in those days. I had a rival. I am leaning back and laughing as I think of him. Charley Putney! He was clerk in a largish dry goods store. He is still a clerk there, I believe, and no doubt is still the same cheaply scented, heavily pomatumed clerkly swell he was in the days when I feared and hated him. The store used to close at six o'clock. About seven of summer evenings Charley would issue forth from his home to set the hearts of the girls to fluttering. They were all out, waiting. Down the street he would come with his hat set a little back to show the beautiful shine and part and roach of his hair. The air would become delicious (!) with bergamot, occasionally varied by German cologne or lemon verbena. What a jaunty, gay tie! What an elegant suit! And he wore a big seal ring, reputed to be real gold—and such lively socks! Down the street came Charley, all the girls palpitant. At which stoop or front gate would he stop?

Often—only too often—it was at the front gate next ours. How I hated him!

And the cap of the joke is that Edna nearly married him. In this land where the social stairs are crowded like Jacob's Ladder with throngs ascending and descending, what a history it would make if the grown men and women of any generation should tell whom they *almost* married!

Yes, Edna came very near to marrying him. She was a lady. She did not know exactly what that meant. The high-life novels she read left her hazy on the subject, because to understand any given thing we must



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

have knowledge that enables us to connect it with the things we already know. A snowball would be an unfathomable mystery to a savage living in an equatorial plain. A matter of politics or finance or sociology or real art, real literature, real philosophy, seems dull and meaningless to a woman or to the average mutton-brained man. But if you span the gap between knowledge of any subject and a woman's or a man's ignorance of that subject with however slender threads of connecting knowledge, she or he can at once bridge it and begin to reap the new fields. Edna could not find any thread whatever for the gap between herself and that fairy land of high life the novels told her about. In those days there was no high life in Passaic. I suppose there is now—or, at least, Passaic thinks there is—and in purely imaginary matters the delusion of possession is equal to, even better than, possession itself. So, with no high life to use as a measure, with only the instinct that her white smooth hands and her dresses modeled on the latest Paris fashions as illustrated in the monthly "Lady Book," and her music lessons, her taste for what she then regarded as literature—with only her instinct that all these hallmarks must stamp her twenty-four carat lady, she had to look about her for a matching gentleman. And there was Charley, the one person within vision who suggested the superb heroes of the high-life novels. I will say to the credit of her good taste that she had her doubts about Charley. Indeed, if his sweet smell and his smooth love-making—Charley excelled as a love maker, being the born ladies' man—if the man, or, rather, the boy, himself had not won her

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

heart, she would soon have tired of him and would have suspected his genuineness as a truly gentleman. But she fell in love with him.

There was a long time during which I thought the reason she returned to me—or, rather, let me return to her—was because she fell out of love with him. Then there was a still longer time when I thought the reason was the fact that the very Saturday I got a raise to fourteen a week, he fell from twelve to eight. But latterly I have known the truth. How many of us know the truth, the down-at-the-bottom, absolute truth, about why she married us instead of the other fellow? Very few, I guess—or we'd be puffing our crops and flirting our feathers less cantily. She took up with me again because he dropped her. It was he that saved her, not she or I. Only a few months ago, her old mother, doddering on in senility, with memory dead except for early happenings, and these fresh and vivid, said: "And when I think how nigh Edny come to marryin' up with that there loud-smelling dude of a Charley Putney! If he hadn't 'a give her the go by, she'd sure 'a made a fool of herself—a wantin' me and her paw to offer him money and a job in the undertakin' store, to git him back. Lawsy me! What a narrer squeak fur Princess Edny!"

Be patient, gentle reader! You shall soon be reading things that will efface the coarse impression my old mother-in-law's language and all these franknesses about our beginnings must have made upon your refined and cultured nature. Swallow a caramel and be patient. But don't skip these pages. If you should, you would

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

miss the stimulating effect of contrast, not to speak of other benefits which I, probably vainly, hope to confer upon you.

She didn't love me. Looking back, I see that for many months she found it difficult to endure me. But it was necessary that she carry off—with the neighborhood rather than with me—her pretense of having cast off Charley because she preferred me. We can do wonders in the way of concealing wounded pride; we can do equal wonders in the way of preserving a reputation for unbroken victory. And I believe she honestly liked me. Perhaps she liked me even more than she liked her aromatic Charley; for, it by no means follows that we like best where we love most. I am loth to believe—I do not believe—that at so early an age, not quite seventeen, she could have received my caresses and returned them with plausibility enough to deceive me, unless she had genuinely liked me.

And what a lucky fellow I thought myself! And how I patronized the perfumed man. And what a thrashing I gave him—poor, harmless, witless creature!—when I heard of his boastings that he had dropped Edna Wheatlands because he found Sally Simpson prettier and more *cultured*!

I must have been a railway man born. At twenty-two—no, six months after my majority—I was jumped into a head clerkship at twelve hundred a year. Big pay for a youngster in those days; not so bad for a youngster even in these inflated years. When I brought Edna the news I think she began to love me. To her that salary was a halo, a golden halo round me—made

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

me seem a superior person. She had long thought highly of my business abilities, for she was shrewd and had listened when the older people talked, and they were all for me as the likeliest young man of the neighborhood.

"I've had another raise," said I carelessly. We were sitting on her front porch, she upon the top step, I two steps down.

"Another!" she said. "Why, the last was only two months ago."

"Yes, they've pushed me up to twelve hundred a year—a little more, for it's twenty-five per."

"Gee!" she exclaimed, and I can see her pretty face now—all aglow, beaming a reverent admiration upon me.

I rather thought I deserved it. But it has ever been one of my vanities to pretend to take my successes as matters of course, and even to depreciate them. They say the English invariably win in diplomacy because they act dissatisfied with what they get, never grumbling so sourly as when they capture the whole hog. I can believe it. That has been my policy, and it has worked rather well. Still, any policy works well if the man has the gift for success. "Twenty-five per," I repeated, to impress it still more deeply upon her and to revel in the thrilling words. "Before I get through I'll make them pay me what I'm worth."

"Do you think you'll ever be making more than that?" exclaimed she, wonderingly.

"I'll be getting two thousand some day," said I, far more confidently than I felt.

"Oh—Godfrey!" she said softly.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

And as I looked at her I for the first time felt a certain peculiar thrill that comes only when the soul of the woman a man loves rushes forth to cling to his soul. In my life I have never had—and never shall have—a happier moment.

Once more patience, gentle reader! I know this bit of sordidness—this glow of sentiment upon a vulgar material incident—disgusts your delicate soul. I am aware that you have a proper contempt for all the coarse details of life. You would not be *gentle* reader if you hadn't. You would be a plain man or woman, living busily and usefully, and making people happy in the plain ways in which the human animal finds happiness. You would not be devoting your days to making soul-food out of idealistic moonshine and dreaming of ways to dazzle yourself and your acquaintances into thinking you a superior person.

"Do you know," said my pretty Edna, advancing her hand at least half way toward meeting mine, "do you know, I've had an instinct, a presentiment of this? I was dreaming it when I woke up this morning."

I've observed that every woman in her effort to prove herself "not like other girls" pretends to some occult or other equally supranatural quality. One dreams dreams. Another gets spirit messages. A third has seen ghosts. Another has a foot which sculptors have longed to model. A fifth has a note in her voice which the throat specialists pronounce unique in the human animal and occurring only in certain rare birds and Sarah Bernhardt. I met one not long ago who had several too many or too few skins, I forget which, and

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

as a result was endowed with I cannot recall what nervous qualities quite peculiar to herself, and somehow most valuable and fascinating. In that early stage of her career my Edna was "hipped" upon a rather commonplace personal characteristic—the notion that she had premonitions, was a sort of seeress or prophetess. Later she dropped it for one less tiresome and overworked. But I recall that even in that time of my deepest infatuation I wished to hear as little as possible about the occult. Of all the shallow, foggy fakes that attract ignorant and miseducated people the occult is the most inexcusable and boring. A great many people, otherwise apparently rather sensible, seem honestly to believe in it. But, being sensible, they don't have anything to do with it. They treat it as practical men treat the idiotic in the creeds and the impossible in the moral codes of the churches to which they belong—that is, they assent and proceed to dismiss and to forget.

However, I was not much impressed by Edna's attempt to dazzle me with her skill as a Sibyl. But I was deeply impressed by the awe-inspiring softness and shapeliness of her hand lying prisoner in mine. And I was moved to the uttermost by the kisses and embraces we exchanged in the gathering dusk. "I love you," she murmured into my ecstatic ear. "You are so different from the other men round here."

I dilated with pride.

"So far ahead of them in every way."

"Ahead of Charley Putney?" said I, jocosely but jealously.

She laughed with a delightful look of contemptuous

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

scorn in her cute face. "Oh, *he!*" she scoffed. "He's getting only eight a week, and he'll never get any more."

"Not if his boss has sense," said I, thinking myself judicial. "But let's talk about ourselves. We can be married now."

I advanced this timidly, for being a truly-in-love lover I was a little afraid of her, a little uncertain of this priceless treasure. But she answered promptly, "Yes, I was thinking of that."

"Let's do it right away," proposed I.

"Oh, not for several weeks. It wouldn't be proper."

"Why not?"

She couldn't explain. She only knew that there was something indecent about haste in such matters, that the procedure must be slow and orderly and stately. "We'll marry the first of next month," she finally decided, and I joyfully acquiesced.

Some of my readers—both of the gentle and of the other kind—may be surprised that a girl of seventeen should be so self-assured, so independent. They must remember that she was a daughter of the people; and among the people a girl of seventeen was, and I suppose still is, ready for marriage, ready and resolved to decide all important matters for herself. At seventeen Edna, in self-poise and in experience, judgment and all the other mature qualities, was the equal of the carefully sheltered girl of twenty-five or more. She may have been brought up a lady, may have been in all essential ways as useless as the most admired of that weariful and worthless class. But the very nature of her sur-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

roundings, in that simple household and that simple community, had given her a certain practical education. And I may say here that to it she owes all she is to-day. Do not forget this, gentle reader, as you read about her and as she dazzles you. As you look at the gorgeous hardy rose do not forget that such spring only from the soil, develop only in the open.

That very evening we began to look for a home. As soon as we were outside her front gate she turned in the direction of the better part of the town. Nor did she pause or so much as glance at a house until we were clear of the neighborhood in which we had always lived, and were among houses much superior. I admired, and I still admire, this significant move of hers. It was the gesture of progress, of ambition. It was splendidly American. I myself should have been content to settle down near our fathers and mothers, among the people we knew. I should no doubt have been better satisfied to keep up the mode of living to which we had been used all our lives. The time would have come when I should have reached out for more comfort and for luxury. But it was natural that she should develop in this direction before I did. She had read her novels and her magazines, had the cultured woman's innate fondness for dress and show, had had nothing but those kinds of things to think about; I had been too busy trying to make money to have any time for getting ideas about spending it.

No; while her motive in seeking better things than we had known was in the main a vanity and a sham, her action had as much *initial* good in it as if her motive



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

had been sensible and helpful. And back of the motive lay an instinct for getting up in the world that has been the redeeming and preserving trait in her character. It was this instinct that ought to have made her the fit wife for an ambitious and advancing man. You will presently see how this fine and useful instinct was perverted by vanity and false education and the pernicious example of other women.

"The rents are much higher in this neighborhood," said I, with a doubtful but admiring look round at the pretty houses and their well-ordered grounds.

"Of course," said she. "But maybe we can find smething. Anyway, it won't do any harm to look."

"No, indeed," I assented, for I liked the idea myself. This better neighborhood *looked* more like her than her own, seemed to her lover's eyes exactly suited to her beauty and her stylishness—for the "Lady Book" was teaching her to make herself far more attractive to the eye than were the other girls over in our part of town. I still puzzle at why Charley Putney gave her up; the only plausible theory seems to be that she was so sick in love with him that she wearied him. The most attractive girl in the world, if she dotes on a young man too ardently, will turn his stomach, and alarm his delicate sense of feminine propriety.

As we walked on, she with an elate and proud air, she said: "How different it smells over here!"

At first I didn't understand what she meant. But, as I thought of her remark, the meaning came. And I believe that was the beginning of my dissatisfaction with what I had all my life had in the way of surroundings.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I have since observed that the sense of smell is blunt, is almost latent, in people of the lower orders, and that it becomes more acute and more sensitive as we ascend in the social scale. Up to that time my ambition to rise had been rather indefinite—a desire to make money which everyone seemed to think was the highest aim in life—and also an instinct to beat the other fellows working with me. Now it became definite. I began to smell. I wanted to get away from unpleasant smells. I do not mean that this was a resolution, all in the twinkling of an eye. I simply mean that, as everything must have a beginning, that remark of hers was for me the beginning of a long and slow but steady process of what may be called civilizing.

Presently she said: “If we couldn’t afford a house, we might take one of the flats.”

“But I’m afraid you’d be lonesome, away off from everybody we know.”

She tossed her head. “A good lonesome,” said she. “I’m tired of *common* people. I was reading about reincarnations the other day.”

“Good Lord!” laughed I. “What are they?”

She explained—as well as she could—probably as well as anybody could. I admired her learning but the thing itself did not interest me. “I guess there must be something in it,” she went on. “I’m sure in a former life I was something a lot different from what I am now.”

“Oh, you’re all right,” I assured her, putting my arm round her in the friendly darkness of a row of side-walk elms.

When we had indulged in an interlude of love-mak-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ing, she returned to the original subject. "I wonder how much rent we could afford to pay," said she.

"They say the rent ought never to be more per month than the income is per week."

"Then we could pay twenty-five a month."

That seemed to me a lot to pay—and, indeed, it was. But she did not inherit Weeping Willie's tightness; and she had never had money to spend or any training in either making or spending money. That is to say, she was precisely as ignorant of the main business of life as is the rest of American womanhood under our ridiculous system of education. So, twenty-five dollars a month rent meant nothing to her. "We can't do anything to-night," said she. "But I've got my days free, and I'll look at different places, and when I find several to choose from we can come in the evening or on Sunday and decide."

This suited me exactly. We dismissed the matter, hunted out a shady nook, and sat down to enjoy ourselves after the manner of young lovers on a fine night. Never before had she given herself freely to love. I know now it was because never before had she loved me. I was deliriously happy that night, and I am sure she was too. She no less than I had the ardent temperament that goes with the ambitious nature; and now that she was idealizing me into the man who could lead her to the fairy lands she dreamed of, she gave me her whole heart.

It was the beginning of what was beyond question the happiest period of both our lives. I have a dim old photograph of us two taken about that time. At a glance you see it is the picture of two young people of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

the working class—two green, unformed creatures, badly dressed and gawkily self-conscious. But there is a look in her face—and in mine— To be quite honest, I'm glad I don't look like that now. I wouldn't go back if I could. Nevertheless— How we loved each other!—and how happy we were!

I feel that I weary you, gentle reader. There is in my sentiment too much about wages and flat rents and the smells that come from people who work hard and live in poor places and eat badly cooked strong food. But that is not my fault. It is life. And if you believe that your and your romancers' tawdry imaginings are better than life—well, you may not be so wise or so exalted as you fancy.

The upshot of our inspecting places to live and haggling over prices was that we took a flat in the best quarter of Passaic—the top and in those elevatorless days the cheapest flat in the house. We were to pay forty dollars a month—a stiff rent that caused excitement in our neighborhood and set my mother and her father to denouncing us as a pair of fools bent upon ruin. I thought so, myself. But I could have denied Edna nothing at that time, and I made up my mind that by working harder than ever at the railway office I would compel another raise. When I told my mother about this secret resolve of mine, she said:

“If you do get more money, Godfrey, don't tell Edna. She's a fool. She'll keep your nose to the grindstone all your life if you ain't careful. It takes a better money-maker than you're likely to be to hold up against that kind of a woman.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Oh, she's like all girls," said I.

"That's just it," replied my mother. "That's why I ain't got no use for women. Look what poor managers they are. Look how they idle and waste and run into debt."

"But there's a lot to be said against the men, too. Saloons, for instance."

"And talkin' politics with loafers," said my father's wife bitterly.

"I guess the trouble with men and women is they're too human," said I, who had inherited something of the philosopher from my father. "And, mother, a man's got to get married—and he's got to marry a woman."

"Yes, I suppose he has," she grudgingly assented. "Mighty poor providers most of the men is, and mighty poor use the women make of what little the men brings home. But about you and Edny Wheatlands— You ought to do better'n her, Godfrey. You're caught by her looks and her style and her education. None of them things makes a good wife."

"I certainly wouldn't marry a girl that didn't have them—all three."

"But there's something more," insisted mother.

"One woman can't have everything," said I.

"No, but she can have what I mean—and she's not much good to a man without it. If you're set on marrying her wait till *you're* ready, anyhow. *She* never will be."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Wait till you've got money in the savings bank. Wait till you've got used to having money. Then maybe

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

you'll be able to put a bit on a spendthrift wife even if you are crazy about her. You're making a wrong start with her, Godfrey. You're giving her the upper hand, and that's bad for women like her—mighty bad."

It was from my mother that I get my ability at business. She and I often had sensible talks, and her advice started me right in the railroad office and kept me right until I knew my way. So I did not become angry at her plain speaking, but appreciated its good sense, even though I thought her prejudiced against my Edna. However, I had not the least impulse to put off the marriage. My one wish was to hasten it. Never before or since was time so leisurely. But the day dragged itself up at last, and we were married in church, at what seemed to us then enormous expense. There was a dinner afterward at which everyone ate and drank too much—a coarse and common scene which I will spare gentle reader. Edna and I went up to New York City for a Friday to Monday honeymoon. But we were back to spend Sunday night in our grand forty-dollar flat. On Monday morning I went to work again—a married man, an important person in the community.

Never has any height I have attained or seen since equalled the grandeur of that forty-dollar flat. My common sense tells me that it was a small and poor affair. I remember, for example, that the bathroom was hardly big enough to turn round in. I recall that I have sat by the window in the parlor and without rising have reached a paper on a table at the other end of the room. But these hard facts in no way interfere with or correct the flat as my imagination persists in

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

picturing it. What vistas of rooms!—what high ceilings—what woodwork—and plumbing!—and what magnificent furniture! Edna's father, in a moment of generosity, told her he would pay for the outfitting of the household. And being in the undertaking business he could get discounts on furniture and even on kitchen utensils. Edna did the selecting. I thought everything wonderful and, as I have said, my imagination refuses to recreate the place as it actually was. But I recall that there was a brave show of red and of plush, and we all know what that means. Whether her "Lady Book" had miseducated her or her untrained eyes, excited by the gaudiness she saw when she went shopping, had beguiled her from the counsels of the "Lady Book," I do not know. But I am sure, as I recall red and plush, that our first home was the typical horror inhabited by the extravagant working-class family.

No matter. There we were in Arcadia. For a time her restless soaring fancy, wearied perhaps by its audacious flight to this lofty perch of red and plush and forty dollars a month, folded its wings and was content. For a time her pride and satisfaction in the luxurious newness overcame her distaste and disdain and moved her to keep things spotless. I recall the perfume of cleanness that used to delight my nostrils at my evening homecoming, and then the intoxicating perfume of Edna herself—the aroma of healthy young feminine beauty. We loved each other, simply, passionately, in the old-fashioned way. With the growth of intelligence, with the realization on the part of men that her keep is a large part of the reason in the woman's mind if not in

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

her heart for marrying and loving, there has come a decline and decay of the former reverence and awe of man toward woman. Also, the men nowadays know more about the mystery of woman, know everything about it, where not so many years ago a pure woman was to a man a real religious mystery. Her physical being, the clothes she wore underneath, the supposedly sweet and clean thoughts, nobler than his, that dwelt in the temple of her soul—these things surrounded a girl with an atmosphere of thrilling enigma for the youth who won from her lips and from the church the right to explore.

All that has passed, or almost passed. I am one of those who believe that what has come, or, rather, is coming, to take its place is better, finer, nobler. But the old order had its charm. What a charm for me!—who had never known any woman well, who had dreamed of her passionately but purely and respectfully. There was much of pain—of shyness, fear of offending her higher nature, uneasiness lest I should be condemned and cast out—in those early days of married life. But it was a sweet sort of pain. And when we began to understand each other—to be human, though still on our best behavior—when we found that we were congenial, were happy together in ways undreamed of, life seemed to be paying not like the bankrupt it usually is when the time for redeeming its promises comes but like a benevolent prodigal, like a lottery whose numbers all draw capital prizes. I admit the truth of much the pessimists have to say against Life. But one thing I must grant it. When in its rare generous moments it



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

relents, it does know how to play the host at the feast—how to spread the board, how to fill the flagons and to keep them filled, how to scatter the wreaths and the garlands, how to select the singers and the dancers who help the banqueters make merry. When I remember my honeymoon, I almost forgive you, Life, for the shabby tricks you have played me.

Now I can conceive a honeymoon that would last on and on, not in the glory and feverish joy of its first period, but in a substantial and satisfying human happiness. But not a honeymoon with a wife who is no more fitted to be a wife than the office boy is fitted to step in and take the president's job. Patience, gentle reader! I know how this sudden shriek of discord across the amorous strains of the honeymoon music must have jarred your nerves. But be patient and I will explain.

Except ourselves, every other family in the house, in the neighborhood, had at least one servant. We had none. If Edna had been at all economical we might have kept a cook and pinched along. But Edna spent carelessly all the money I gave her, and I gave her all there was. A large part of it went for finery for her personal adornment, trash of which she soon tired—much of it she disliked as soon as it came home and she tried it on without the saleslady to flatter and confuse. I—in a good-natured way, for I really felt perfectly good-humored about it—remonstrated with her for letting everybody rob her, for getting so little for her money. She took high ground. Such things were beneath her attention. If I had wanted a wife of that dull, pinch-penny kind I'd certainly not have married

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

her, a talented, educated woman, bent on improving her mind and her position in the world. And that seemed reasonable. Still, the money was going, the bills were piling up, and I did not know what to do.

And—she did the cooking. I think I have already said that she had not learned to cook. How she and her mother expected her to get along as a poor clerk's wife I can't imagine. The worst of it was, she believed she could cook. That is the way with women. They look down on housekeeping, on the practical side of life, as too coarse and low to be worthy their attention. They say all that sort of thing is easy, is like the toil of a day laborer. They say anybody could do it. And they really believe so. Men, no matter how high their position, weary and bore themselves every day, because they must, with routine tasks beside which dishwashing has charm and variety. Yet women shirk their proper and necessary share of life's burden, pretending that it is beneath them.

Edna, typical woman, thought she could cook and keep house because she, so superior, could certainly do inferior work if she chose. But after that first brief spurt of enthusiasm, of daily conference with the "Lady Book's Complete Housekeeper's Guide," the flat was badly kept—was really horribly kept—was worse than either her home or mine before we had been living there many months. It took on much the same odor. It looked worse, as tawdry finery, when mussy and dirty, is more repulsive than a plain toilet gone back. I did not especially mind that. But her cooking—I had not been accustomed to anything especially good in the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

way of cooking. Mother was the old-fashioned fryer, and you know those fryers always served the vegetables soggy. I could have eaten exceedingly poor stuff without complaining or feeling like complaining. But the stuff she was soon flinging angrily upon the slovenly table I could not eat. She ate it, enough of it to keep alive, and it didn't seem to do her any harm. How many women have you known who were judges of things to eat? Do you understand how women continue to eat the messes they put into their pretty mouths, and keep alive?

I could not eat Edna's cooking. I ate bread, cold meats and the like from the delicatessen shop. When the meal happened to be of her own preparing I dropped into the habit of slipping away after a pretense at eating, to get breakfast or dinner or supper in a restaurant—the cheapest kind of restaurant, but I ate there with relish. And never once did I murmur to Edna. I loved her too well; also, I am by nature a tolerant, even-tempered person, hating strife, avoiding the harsh word. In fact, my timidity in that respect has been my chief weakness, has cost me dear again and again. But——

After ten months of married life Edna fell ill. All you married men will prick up your ears at that. Why is it that bread winners somehow contrive to keep on their feet most of the time, little though they know as to caring for their health, reckless though they are in eating and drinking? Why is it that married women—unless they have to work—spend so much time in sick bed or near it? They say we in America have more

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

than nine times as many doctors proportionately to population as any other country. The doctors live off of our women—our idle, overeating, lazy women who will not work, who will not walk, who are always getting something the matter with them. Of course the doctors—parasites upon parasites—fake up all kinds of lies, many of them malicious slanders against the husbands, to excuse their patients and to keep them patients. But what is the truth?

Edna, who read all the time she was not plotting to get acquainted with our neighbors—they looked down upon us and wished to have nothing to do with us—Edna who ate quantities of candy between meals and ate at meals rich things she bought of confectioners and bakers—Edna fell ill and frightened me almost out of my senses. I understand it now. But I did not understand then. I believed, as do all ignorant people—both the obviously ignorant and the ignorant who pass for enlightened—I believed sickness to be a mysterious accident, like earthquakes and lightning strokes, a hit-or-miss blow from nowhere in particular. So I was all sympathy and terror.

She got well. She looked as well as ever. But she said she was not strong. “And Godfrey, we simply have got to keep a girl. I’ve borne up bravely. But I can’t stand it any longer. You see for yourself, the rough work and the strain of housekeeping are too much for me.”

“Very well,” said I. The bills, including the doctor’s and drug bills, were piling up. We were more than a thousand dollars in debt. But I said: “Very

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

well. You are right." We men do not realize that there are two distinct and equal expressions of strength. The strength of bulk, that is often deceptive in that it looks stronger than it is; the strength of fiber, that is always deceptive in that it is stronger than it looks. In a general way, man has the strength of bulk, woman the strength of fiber. So man looks on woman's appearance of fragility and fancies her weak and himself the stronger. I looked at Edna, and said: "Very well. We must have a girl to help."

I shan't linger upon this part of my story. I am tempted to linger, but, after all, it is the commonplace of American life, familiar to all, though understood apparently by only a few. Why do more than ninety per cent of our small business men fail? Why are the savings banks accounts of our working classes a mere fraction of those of the working classes of other countries? And so on, and so on. But I see your impatience, gentle reader, with these matters so "inartistic." We sank deeper and deeper in debt. Edna's health did not improve. The girl we hired had lived with better class people; she despised us, shirked her work, and Edna did not know how to manage her. If the head of the household is incompetent and indifferent, a servant only aggravates the mess, and the more servants the greater the mess. All Edna's interest was for her music, her novels, her social advancement, and her dreams of being a grand lady. These dreams had returned with increased power; they took complete possession of her. They soured her disposition, made her irritable, usually blue or cross, only at long intervals loving and sweet. No, perhaps

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

the dreams were not responsible. Perhaps—probably—the real cause was the upset state of her health through the absurd idle life she led. Idle and lonely. For she would not go with whom she could, she could not go with whom she would.

“I’m sick of sitting alone,” said she. “No wonder I can’t get well.”

“Let’s go back near the old folks,” suggested I. “Our friends won’t come to see us in this part of the town. They feel uncomfortable.”

“I should think they would!” cried she. “And if they came I’d see to it that they were so uncomfortable that they would never come again.”

I worked hard. My salary went up to fifteen hundred, to two thousand, to twenty-five hundred. “Now,” said Edna, “perhaps you’ll get hands that won’t look like a laboring man’s. How can I hope to make nice friends when I’ve a husband with broken finger nails?”

Our expenses continued to outrun my salary, but I was not especially worried, for I began to realize that I had the money-making talent. Three children were born; only the first—Margot—lived. Looking back upon those six years of our married life, I see after the first year only a confused repellent mess of illness, nurses, death, doctors, quarrels with servants, untidy rooms and clothes, slovenly, peevish wife, with myself watching it all in a dazed, helpless way, thinking it must be the normal, natural order of domestic life—which, indeed, it is in America—and wondering where and how it was to end.

I recall going home one afternoon late, to find Edna

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

yawning listlessly over some book in a magazine culture series. Her hair hung every which way, her wrapper was torn and stained. Her skin had the musty look that suggests unpleasant conditions both without and within. Margot, dirty, pimply from too much candy, sat on the floor squalling.

"Take the child away," cried Edna, at sight of me. "I thought you'd never come. A little more of this and I'll kill myself. What is there to live for, anyhow?"

Silent and depressed, I took Margot for a walk. And as I wandered along sadly I was full of pity for Edna, and felt that somehow the blame was wholly mine for the wretched plight of our home life.

When I was twenty-eight and Edna twenty-three, I had a series of rapid promotions which landed me in New York in the position of assistant traffic superintendent. My salary was eight thousand a year.

It so happened—coincidence and nothing else—that those eighteen months of quick advance for me also marked a notable change in Edna.

There are some people—many people—so obsessed of the know-it-all vanity that they can learn nothing. Nor are all these people preachers, doctors, and teachers, gentle reader. Then there is another species who pretend to know all, who are chary of admitting to learning or needing to learn anything, however small, yet who behind their pretense toil at improving themselves as a hungry mouse gnaws at the wall of the cheese box. Of this species was Edna. As she was fond of being mysterious about her thoughts and intentions,

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

she never told me what set her going again after that long lethargy. Perhaps it was some woman whom she had a sudden opportunity thoroughly to study, some woman who knew and lived the ideas Edna had groped for in vain. Perhaps it was a novel she read or articles in her magazines. It doesn't matter. I never asked her; I had learned that wild horses would not drag from her a confession of where she had got an idea, because such a confession would to her notion detract from her own glory. However, the essential fact is that she suddenly roused and set to work as she had never worked before—went at it like a prospector who, after toiling now hard and now discouragedly for years, strikes by accident a rich vein of gold. Edna showed in every move that she not hoped, not believed, but knew she was at last on the right track. She began to take care, scrupulous care, of her person—the minute intelligent care she has ever since been expanding and improving upon, has never since relaxed, and never will relax. Also she began to plan and to move definitely in the matter of taking care of Margot—to look after her speech, her manners, her food, her person, especially, perhaps, the last. Margot's teeth, Margot's hair, Margot's walk, Margot's feet and hands and skin, the shape of her nose, the set of her ears—all these things she talked about and fussed with as agitatedly as about her own self.

Edna became a crank on the subject of food—what is called a crank by the unthinking, of whom, by the way, I was to my lasting regret one until a few years ago. For a year or two her moves in this important direction were blundering, intermittent, and not always



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

successful—small wonder when there is really no reliable information to be had, the scientists being uncertain and the doctors grossly ignorant. But gradually she evolved and lived upon a “beauty diet.” Margot, of course, had to do the same. She took exercises morning and night, took long and regular walks for the figure and skin and to put clearness and brightness into the eyes. I believe she and Margot, with occasional lapses, keep up their regimen to this day.

The house was as slattern as ever. The diet and comfort and health of the family bread-winner were no more the subject of thought and care than—well, than the next husband's to his wife. She gave some attention—intelligent and valuable attention, I cheerfully concede—to improving my speech, manners, and dress. But beyond that the revolution affected only her and her daughter. Them it affected amazingly. In three or four months the change in their appearance was literally beyond belief. Edna's beauty and style came back—no, burst forth in an entirely new kind of radiance and fascination. As for little Margot, she transformed from homeliness, from the scrawny pasty look of bad health, from bad temper, into as neat and sweet and pretty a little lady as could be found anywhere.

You, gentle reader, who are ever ready to slop over with some kind of sentimentality because in your shallowness you regard sentimentality—not sentiment, for of that you know nothing, but sentimentality—as the most important thing in the world, just as a child regards sickeningly rich cake as the finest food in the world—you, gentle reader, have already made up your

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

mind why Edna thus suddenly awakened, or, rather, re-awakened. "Aha," you are saying. "Served him good and right. She found some one who appreciated her." That guess of yours shows how little you know about Edna or the Edna kind of human being. The people who do things in this world, except in our foolish American novels, do because they must. They may do better or worse under the influence of love, which is full as often a drag as a spur. But they do not *do* because of love. I shall not argue this. I shrink from gratuitously inviting an additional vial of wrath from the ladies, who resent being told how worthless they in their indolence and self-complacence permit themselves to be and how small a positive part they now play in the world drama. I should have said nothing at all about the matter, were it not that I wish to be strictly just to Edna, and she, being wholly the ambitious woman, has always had and still has a deep horror of scandal, intrigue, irregularity, and unconventionality of every sort.

It was necessary that we move to a place more convenient to my business headquarters in New York City. A few weeks after I got the eight thousand a year, Edna, and little Margot and I went to Brooklyn to live—took a really charming house in Bedford Avenue, with large grounds around it. And once more we were happy. It seemed to me we had started afresh.

And we had.

## II

WHY did we go to Brooklyn?

By the time Edna and I had been married six years I learned many things about her inmost self. I was not at all analytic or critical as to matters at home. I used my intelligence in my own business; I assumed that my wife had intelligence and that she used it in her business—her part of our joint business. I believed the reason her part of it went badly was solely the natural conditions of life beyond her control. A railroad, a factory could be run smoothly; a family and a household were different matters. And I admired my wife as much as I loved her, and regarded her as a wonderful woman, which, indeed, in certain respects she was.

But I had discovered in her several weaknesses. Some of these I knew; others I did not permit myself to know that I knew. For example, I was perfectly aware that she was not so truthful as one might be. But I did not let myself admit that she was not always unconscious of her own deviations from the truth. I had gained enough experience of life to learn that lying is practically a universal weakness. So I did not especially mind it in her, often found it amusing. I had not then waked up to the fact that, as a rule, women systematically lie to their husbands about

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

big things and little, and that those women who profess to be too proud to lie, do their lying by indirections, such as omissions, half truths, and misleading silences. I am not criticising. Self-respect, real personal pride, I have discovered in spite of the reading matter of all kinds about the past, is a modern development, is still in embryo; and those of us who profess to be the proudest are either the most ignorant of ourselves or the most hypocritical.

But back to my acquaintance with my wife's character. When I told her we should have to live nearer my work, my new work, than Passaic, she promptly said:

"Let's go to Brooklyn."

"Why not to New York?" said I. "At least until I get thoroughly trained, I want to be close to the office."

"But there's Margot," said she. "Margot must have a place to play in. And we couldn't afford such a place in New York. I can't let her run about the streets or go to public schools. She'd pick up all sorts of low, coarse associates and habits."

"Then let's go to some town opposite—across the Hudson. If we can't live on Manhattan Island, and I think you're right about Margot, why, let's live where living is cheap. We ought to be saving some money."

"I hate these Jersey towns," said Edna petulantly. "I don't think Margot would get the right sort of social influences in them."

As soon as she said "social influences" I should have understood the whole business. The only person higher up on the social ladder with whom Edna had been

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

able to scrape intimate acquaintance in Passaic was a dowdy, tawdry chatterbox of a woman—I forget her name—who talked incessantly of the fashionable people she knew in Brooklyn—how she had gone there a stranger, had joined St. Mary's Episcopal Church, and had at once become a social favorite, invited to “the very best houses, my dear; such lovely homes,” and associated with “the most charming cultured people,” and so on and on—you know the rest of the humbug.

Now, one of the discoveries about my wife which I but half understood and made light of, had been that she was mad, literally mad, on the subject of social climbing. That means she was possessed of the disease imported into this country from England, where it has raged for upward of half a century—the disease of being bent upon associating by hook or by crook with people whose strongest desire seems to be not to associate with you. This plague does not spare the male population—by no means. But it rages in and ravages the female population almost to a woman. Our women take incidental interest or no interest in their homes, in their husbands, in their children. Their hearts are centered upon social position, and, of course, the money-squandering necessary to attaining or to keeping it. The women who are “in” spend all their time, whatever they may seem to be about, in spitting upon and kicking the faces of the women who are trying to get “in.” The women who are trying to get “in” spend their whole time in smiling and cringing and imploring and plotting and, when it seems expedient, threatening and compelling. Probe to the bottom—if you have acute-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ness enough, which you probably haven't—probe to the bottom any of the present-day activities of the American woman, I care not what it may be, and you will discover the bacillus of social position biting merrily away at her. If she goes to church or to a lecture or a concert—if she goes calling or stays at home—if she joins a suffrage movement or a tenement reform propaganda, or refuses to join—if she dresses noisily or plainly—if she shuns society or seeks it, if she keeps house or leaves housekeeping to servants, roaches, and mice—if she cares for or neglects her children—if she pets her husband or displaces him with another—no matter what she does, it is at the behest of the poison flowing through brain and vein from the social-position bacillus. She thinks by doing whatever she does she will somehow make her position more brilliant or less insecure, or, having no position at all, will gain one.

And the men? They pay the bills. Sometimes reluctantly, again eagerly; sometimes ignorantly, again with full knowledge. The men—they pay the bills.

Now you know better far than I knew at the time why our happy little family went to Brooklyn, took the house in Bedford Avenue which we could ill afford if we were to save any money, and joined St. Mary's.

A couple of years after we were married my wife stopped me when I was telling her what had happened at the office that day, as was my habit. "You ought to leave all those things outside when you come home," said she.

She had read this in a book somewhere, I guess. It was a new idea to me. "Why should I?" said I.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Home is a place for happiness, with all the sordidness shut out," explained she. "Those sordid things ought not to touch our life together."

This sounded all right. "It seemed to me," stammered I, apologetically, "that my career, the way I was getting on, that our bread and butter— Well, I thought we ought to kind of talk it over together."

"Oh, I do sympathize with you," said, or rather quoted, she. "But my place is to soothe and smooth away the cares of business. You ought to try not to think of them at home."

"But what *would* I think about?" cried I, much perplexed. "Why, my business is all I've got. It's the most important thing in the world to us. It means our living. At least that's the way the thing looks to me."

"You ought to think at home about the higher side of life—the intellectual side."

"But my business is my intellectual side," I said. "And I can't for the life of me see why thinking about things that don't advance us and don't pay the bills is better than thinking about things that do." It seemed to me that this looking on my business as something to be left on the mud-scraper at the entrance indicated a false idea of it got somewhere. So I added somewhat warmly: "There's nothing low or bad about my business." And that was the truth at the time.

"I don't know anything about it," replied she with the gentle patience of her superior refinement and education. "And I don't want to know. Those things don't interest me. And I think, Godfrey"—very sweetly, with her cheek against mine—"the reason hus-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

bands and wives often grow apart is that the husband gives his whole mind to his business and doesn't develop the higher side of his nature—the side that appeals to a woman and satisfies her.”

This touched my sense of humor mildly. “My father gives his mind to one of those high sides,” said I, “and we nearly starved to death.”

“Your father!” exclaimed she in derisive disgust.

“My father,” said I cheerfully, “he does nothing but read, talk, and think politics.”

“Politics! *That* isn't on the higher side. Women don't care anything about *that*.”

“Well, what do they care about?” I inquired.

“About music and literature—and those artistic things.”

“Oh, those things are all right,” said I. “But I don't see that it takes any more brains or any better brains to paint a picture or sing a song or write a novel than it does to run a railroad—or to plan one. If you'd try to understand business, dear,” I urged, “you might find it as interesting and as intellectual as anything that doesn't help us make a living. Anyhow, I've simply got to give my brains to my work. You go ahead and attend to the higher side for the family. I'll stick to the job that butters the bread and keeps the rain off.”

She was patient with me, but I saw she didn't approve. However, as I knew she'd approve still less if I failed to provide for her and the two young ones—there were two at that time—I let the matter drop and held to the common-sense course. I hadn't the faintest



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

notion of the seriousness of that little talk of ours. And it was well I hadn't, for to have made her realize her folly I'd have had to start in and educate her—un-educate her and then reëducate her. I don't blame the women. I feel sorry for them. When I hear them talk about the lack of sympathy between themselves and American men, about the low ideals and the sordid talk the men indulge in, how dull it is, how different from the inspiring, cultured talk a woman hears among the aristocrats abroad, said aristocrats being supported in helpless idleness throughout their useless lives, often by hard-earned American dollars—when I hear this pitiful balderdash from fair lips, I grow sad. The American woman fancies she is growing away from the American man. The truth is that while she is sitting still, playing with a lapful of the artificial flowers of fake culture, like a poor doodle-wit, the American man is growing away from her. She knows nothing of value; she can do nothing of value. She has nothing to offer the American man but her physical charms, for he has no time or taste for playing with artificial flowers when the world's important work is to be done. So the poor creature grows more isolated, more neglected, less respected, and less sought, except in a physical way. And all the while she hugs to her bosom the delusion that she is the great soul high sorrowful. The world moves; many are the penalties for the nation or the race or the sex that does not move with it, or does not move quickly enough. I feel sorry for the American woman—unless she has a father who will leave her rich or a husband who will give her riches.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I feel some of my readers saying that I must have been most unfortunate in the women I have known. Perhaps. But may it not be that those commiserating readers have been rarely fortunate in their feminine acquaintances?—or in lack of insight?

Now you probably not only know why we went to Brooklyn, but also what we did after we got there. I have not forgotten my promise to gentle reader. I shall not linger many moments in Brooklyn. True, it is superior to Passaic, at least to the part of Passaic in which I constrained gentle reader to tarry a minute or two. But it is still far from the promised heights.

My wife owes a vast deal to Brooklyn. As she haughtily ignores the debt, would deny it if publicly charged, I shall pay it for her. Brooklyn was her finishing school. It made her what she is.

In the last year or so we spent in Passaic there had been, as I have hinted, a marked outward change in all three of us. The least, or rather the least abrupt, change had been in me. Associated in business with a more prosperous and better-dressed and better-educated class of men, I had gradually picked up the sort of knowledge a man needs to fit himself for the inevitably changing social conditions accompanying a steady advance in material prosperity. I was as quick to learn one kind of useful thing as another. And just as I learned how to fill larger and larger positions and how to make money out of the chances that come to a man situated where money is to be made, so I learned how to dress like a man of the better class, how to speak a less slangy and a less ungrammatical English, how to use

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

my mind in thinking and in discussing a thousand subjects not directly related to my business.

If my wife had been interested in any of the important things of the world, I could have been of the greatest assistance to her and she to me. And we should have grown ever closer together in sympathetic companionship. But although she had a good mind—a superior mind—she cared about nothing but the things that interest foolish women and still more foolish men—for a man who cares about splurge and show and social position and such nonsense is less excusable, is more foolish, than a woman of the same sort. Women have the excuse of lack of serious occupation, but what excuse has a man? Still, she was not idle—not for a minute. She was, on the contrary, in her way as busy as I. From time to time she would say to me enigmatically: “You don’t appreciate it, but I am preparing myself to help you fill the station your business ability will win us a chance at.” It seemed to me that I was doing that alone. For what was necessary to fill that station but higher and higher skill as a man of affairs?

When we had made our entry in Brooklyn and had seated ourselves in the state in Bedford Avenue which she had decided for, she showed that she felt immensely proud of herself. We took the house furnished throughout—nicely furnished in a substantial way, for it had been the home of one of the old Brooklyn mercantile families.

“It’s good enough to start with,” said she, casting a critical glance round the sober, homelike dining

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

room. "I shan't make any changes till I look about me."

"We couldn't be better off," said I. "Everything is perfectly comfortable." And in fact neither she nor I had ever before known what comfort was. Looking at that house—merely looking at it and puzzling out the uses of the various things to us theretofore unknown—was about as important in the way of education as learning to read is to a child.

"It's good enough for Brooklyn," said she. She regarded me with her patient, tender expression of the superior intelligence. "You haven't much imagination or ambition, Godfrey," she went on. "But fortunately *I* have. And do be careful not to betray us before the servants I'm engaging."

The show part of the house continued to look about as it had when we took possession. But the living part went to pieces rapidly. We had many servants. We spent much money—so much that, if I had not been speculating in various ways, we should have soon gone under. But the results were miserably poor. My wife left everything to her servants and devoted herself to her social career. The ex-Brooklyn society woman at Passaic had not deceived her. No sooner had she joined St. Mary's than she began to have friends—friends of a far higher social rank than she had ever even seen at close range before. They were elegant people indeed—the wives of the heads of departments in big stores, the families of bank officers and lawyers and doctors. There were even a few rather rich people. My wife was in ecstasy for a year or two. And she

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

improved rapidly in looks, in dress, in manners, in speech, in all ways except in disposition and character.

Except in disposition and character. As we grow older and rise in the world, there is always a deterioration both in disposition and in character. A man's disposition grows sharper through dealing with, and having to deal sharply with, incompetence. The character tends to harden as he is forced to make the unpleasant and often not too scrupulous moves necessary to getting himself forward toward success. Also, the way everyone tries to use a successful man makes him more and more acute in penetrating to the real motives of his fellow beings, more and more inclined to take up men for what he can get out of them and drop them when he has squeezed out all the advantage—in brief, to treat them precisely as they treat him. But the whole object in having a home, a wife, a family, is defeated if the man has not there a something that checks the tendencies to cynicism and coldness which active life not merely encourages but even compels.

There was no occasion for Edna's becoming vixenish and hard. It was altogether due to the idiotic and worthless social climbing. She had a swarm of friends, yet not a single friend. She cultivated people socially, and they cultivated her, not for the natural and kindly and elevating reasons, but altogether for the detestable purposes of that ghastly craze for social position. Edna was bitter against me for a long time, never again became fully reconciled, because I soon flatly refused to have anything to do with it.

"They will think there's something wrong about

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

you, and about me, if you don't come with me," pleaded she.

"I need my strength for my business," said I. "And what do I care whether they think well or ill of me? They don't give us any money."

"You are *so* sordid!" cried she. "Sometimes I'm almost tempted to give up, and not try to be somebody and to make somebodies of Margot and you."

"I wish you would," said I. "Why shouldn't we live quietly and mind our own business and be happy?"

"How fortunate it is for Margot that she has a mother with ambition and pride!"

"Well—no matter. But please do get another cook. This one is, if anything, worse than the last—except when we have company."

We were forever changing cooks. The food that came on our table was something atrocious. I heard the same complaint from all my married associates at the office, even from the higher officials who were rich men and lived in great state. They, too, had American wives. In the markets and shops I saw as I passed along all sorts of attractive things to eat, and of real quality. I wondered why we never had those things on our table. Heaven knows we spent money enough. The time came when I got a clew to the mystery.

One day Edna said: "I've been doing my house-keeping altogether by telephone. I think I'll stop it, except on rainy days and when I don't feel well."

By telephone! I laughed to myself. No wonder we had poor stuff and paid the highest prices for it. I thought a while, then to satisfy my curiosity began to

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ask questions, very cautiously, for Edna was extremely touchy, as we all are in matters where in our hearts we know we are in the wrong. "Do you remember what kind of range we have in our kitchen?" I asked.

"I?" exclaimed she disgustedly. "Certainly not. I haven't been down to the kitchen since we first moved into this house. I've something better to do than to meddle with the servants."

"Naturally," said I soothingly. And I didn't let her see how her confession amused me. What if a man tried to run his business in that fashion! And ordering by telephone! Why, it was an invitation to the tradespeople to swindle us in every way. But I said nothing.

As usually either it was bad weather or Edna was not feeling well, or was in a rush to keep some social engagement, the ordering for the house continued to be done by telephone, when it was not left entirely to the discretion of the servants. One morning it so happened that she and I left the house at the same time. Said she:

"I'm on my way to do the marketing. It's a terrible nuisance, and I know so little about those things. But it's coming to be regarded as fashionable for a woman to do her own marketing. Some of the best families—people with their own carriages and servants in livery—some of the swellest ladies in Brooklyn do it now. It's a fad from across the river."

"You must be careful not to overtax yourself," said I.

And I said it quite seriously, for in those days of my innocence I was worried about her, thought her a poor

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

overworked angel, was glad I had the money to relieve her from the worst tasks and to leave her free to amuse herself and to take care of her health! I had not yet started in the direction of ridding myself of the masculine delusion that woman is a delicate creature by nature if she happens to be a lady—and of course I knew my Edna was a lady through and through. It was many a year before I learned the truth—why ladies are always ailing and why they can do nothing but wear fine clothes and sit in parlors or in carriages when they are not sitting at indigestible food, and amuse themselves and pity themselves for being condemned to live with coarse, uninteresting American men.

Yes, I was sincere in urging her to take care how she adopted so laborious a fad as doing her own marketing. She went on:

“If I had a carriage it wouldn’t be so bad.”

She said this sweetly enough and with no suggestion of reproach. Just the sigh of a lady’s soul at the hardness of life’s conditions. But I, loving her, felt as if I were somehow to blame. “You shall have a carriage before many years,” said I. “That’s one of the things I’ve been working for.”

She gave me a look that made me feel proud I had her to live for. “I hope I’ll be here to enjoy it,” sighed she.

I walked sad and silent by her side, profoundly impressed and depressed by that hint as to her feeble health. I know now it was sheer pretense with her, the more easily to manage me and to cover her shortcomings. I ought to have realized it then. But what man



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

does? She certainly did not look ill, for she was not one of those who were always stuffing themselves at teas and lunches, and talked of a walk of five blocks as hard exercise! She had learned how to keep health and beauty. What intelligence it shows, that she was able to grasp so difficult a matter; and what splendid persistence that she was able to carry out a mode of life so disagreeable to self-indulgence. If her intelligence and her persistence could have been turned to use! Presently we were at the butcher shop. I paused in the doorway while she engaged in her arduous labor. Here is the conversation:

“Good morning, Mr. Toomey.” (Very gracious; the lady speaking to the trades person.)

“Good morning, ma’am.” (Fat little butcher touching cracked and broken-nailed hand to hat respectfully.)

“That lamb you sent yesterday was very tough.”

“Sorry, ma’am. But those kind of things will happen, you know.” (Most flatteringly humble of manner.)

“Yes, I know. Do your best. I’m sure you try to please. Send me—let me see—say, two chickens for broiling. You’ll pick out nice ones?”

“Yes, indeed, ma’am. I’ll attend to it myself.”

“And something for the servants. You know what they like.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll attend to it.”

“And you’ll not overcharge, will you?”

“I, ma’am? I’ve been dealing with ladies for twenty years, right here, ma’am. I never have overcharged.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I know. All the ladies tell me you're honest. I feel safe with you. Let me see, there were some other things. But I'm in a hurry. The cook will tell your boy when he takes what I've ordered. You'll be sure to give me the best?"

"I'd not dare send anything else to *you*, ma'am."  
(Groveling.)

A gracious smile, a gracious nod, and Edna rejoined me. Innocent as I was, and under the spell that blinds the American man where the American woman is concerned, I could not but be upset by this example of how our house was run—an example that all in an instant brought to my mind and enabled me to understand a score, a hundred similar examples. There was I, toiling away to make money, earning every dollar by the hardest kind of mental labor, struggling to rise, to make our fortune, and each day my wife was tossing carelessly out of the windows into the street a large part of my earnings. I did not know what to do about it.

Edna's next stop was at the grocer's. I had not the courage to halt and listen. I knew it would be a repetition of the grotesque interview with the butcher. And she undoubtedly a clever woman—alert, improving. What a mystery! I went on to my office. That day, without giving my acquaintances there an inkling of what was in my mind, I made inquiries into how their wives spent the money that went for food—the most important item in the spending of incomes under ten or twelve thousand a year. In every case the wife or the mother did the marketing by telephone. All the men

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

except one took the ignorance and incompetence of the management of the household expenses as a matter of course. One man grumbled a little. I remember he said: "No wonder it's hard for the men to save anything. The women waste most of it on the table, paying double prices for poor stuff. I tell you, Loring, the American woman is responsible for the dishonesty of American commercial life. They are always nagging at the man for more and more money to spend, and in spending it they tempt the merchants, the clerks, their own servants, everyone within range, to become swindlers and thieves."

"Oh, nonsense," said I. "You're a pessimist. The American woman is all right. Where'd you find her equal for intelligence and charm?"

"She may be intelligent," said he. "She doesn't use it on anything worth while, except roping in some poor sucker to put up *for* her and to put up *with* her. And she may have charm, but not for a man who has cut his matrimonial eye teeth."

I laughed at Van Dyck—that was my grumbling friend's name. And I soon dropped the subject from my mind. It has never been my habit to waste time in thinking about things when the thinking could not possibly lead anywhere. You may say I ought to have interfered, forced my wife to come to her senses, compelled her to learn her business. Which shows that you know little about the nature of the American woman. If I had taken that course, she would have hated me, she would have done no better, and she would have scorned me as a sordid haggler over small sums

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

of money who was trying to spoil with the vulgarities of commercial life the beauties of the home. No, I instinctively knew enough not to interfere.

But let us take a long leap forward to the day when I became president of the railroad, having made myself a rich man by judicious gambling with eight thousand dollars loaned me by father Wheatlands. He was a rich man, and in the way to become very rich, and he had no heir but Edna after the drowning of her two brothers under a sailboat in Newark Bay. Margot was in a fashionable school over in New York. My wife and I, still a young couple and she beautiful—my wife and I were as happy as any married couple can be where they let each other alone and the husband gives the wife all the money she wishes and leaves her free to spend it as she pleases.

When I told her of my good fortune, and the sudden and large betterment of our finances, she said with a curious lighting of the eyes, a curious strengthening of the chin:

“Now—for New York!”

“New York?” said I. “What does that mean?”

“We are going to live in New York,” replied she.

“But we do live in New York. Brooklyn is part of New York.”

“Legally I suppose it is,” replied she. “But morally and æsthetically, socially, and in every other civilized way, my dear Godfrey, it is part of the backwoods. I can hardly wait to get away.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Why, I thought you were happy here!" exclaimed I, marveling, used though I was to her keeping her own counsel strictly about the matters that most interested her. "You've certainly acted as if you loved it."

"I didn't *mind* it at first," conceded she. "But for two or three years I have *loathed* it, and everybody that lives in it."

I was amazed at this last sally. "Oh, come now, Edna," cried I, "you've got lots of friends here—lots and lots of them."

I was thinking of the dozen or so women whom she called and who called her by the first name, women she was with early and late. Women she was daily playing bridge with— Bridge! I have a friend who declares that bridge is ruining the American home, and I see his point, but I think he doesn't look deep enough. If it weren't bridge it would be something else. Bridge is a striking example, but only a single example, of the results of feminine folly and idleness that all flow from the same cause. However, let us go back to my talk with Edna. She met my protest in behalf of her friends with a contemptuous:

"I don't know a soul who isn't *frightfully* common."

"They're the same sort of people we are."

"Not the same sort that *I* am," declared she proudly. "And not the sort Margot and you are going to be. You'll see. You don't know about these things. But fortunately I do."

"You don't seriously mean that you want to leave this splendid old house——"

"Splendid? It's hardly fit to live in. Of course, we

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

had to endure it while we were poor and obscure. But now it won't do at all."

"And go away from all these people you've worked so hard to get in with—all these friends—go away among strangers. *I* don't mind. But what would *you* do? How'd you pass the days?"

"These vulgar people bore me to death," declared she. "I've been advancing, if you have stood still. Thank God, *I've* got ambition."

"Heaven knows they've never been *my* friends," said I. "But I must say they seem nice enough people, as people go. What's the matter with 'em?"

"They're common," said she with the languor of one explaining when he feels he will not be understood. "They're tiresome."

"I'll admit they're tiresome," said I. "That's why I've kept away from them. But I doubt if they're more tiresome than people generally. The fact is, my dear, people are all tiresome. That's why they can't amuse themselves or each other, but have to be amused—have to hire the clever people of all sorts to entertain them. Instead of asking people here to bore us and to be bored, why not send them seats at a theater or orders for a first-class meal at a first-class restaurant?"

"I suppose you think that's funny," said my wife. She had no sense of humor, and the suggestion of a jest irritated her.

"Yes, it does strike me as funny," I admitted. "But there's sense in it, too. . . . I'm sure you don't want to abandon your friends here. Why make ourselves uncomfortable all over again?" I took a serious

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

persuasive tone. "Edna, we're beginning to get used to the more stylish way of living we took up when we left Passaic and came here to live. Is it sensible to branch out again into the untried and the unknown? Will we be any wiser or any happier? You can shine as the big star now in this circle of friends. You like to run things socially. Here's your chance."

"How could I get any pleasure out of running things socially in St. Mary's?" demanded she. "I've outgrown it. It seems vulgar and common to me. It *is* vulgar and common."

"What does that mean?" I asked innocently.

"If you don't understand, I can't tell you," replied she tartly. "Surely you must see that your wife and your daughter are superior to these people round here."

"I don't compare my wife and daughter with other people," said I. "To me they're superior to anybody and everybody else in the world. I often wish we lived 'way off in the country somewhere. I'm sure we'd be happier with only each other. We're putting on too much style to suit me, even now."

"I see you living in the country," laughed she. "You'd come down about once a week or month."

I couldn't deny the truth in her accusation. I felt it ought to have been that my wife and I were so sympathetic, so interested in the same things, that we were absorbed in each other. But the facts were against it. We really had almost nothing in common. I admired her beauty and also her intelligence and energy, though I thought them misdirected. She, I think, liked me in the primitive way of a woman with a man. And she

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

admired my ability to make money, though she thought it rather a low form of intellectual excellence. However, as she found it extremely useful, she admired me for it in a way. I have seen much of the aristocratic temperament that despises money, but I have yet to see an aristocrat who wasn't greedier than the greediest money-grubber—and I must say it is hard to conceive anything lower than the spirit that grabs the gift and despises the giver. But then, some day, when thinking is done more clearly, we shall all see that aristocracy and its spirit is the lowest level of human nature, is simply a deep-seated survival of barbarism. However, Edna and I appealed to and satisfied each other in one way; beyond that our congeniality abruptly ended. Looking back, I see now that talking *with* her was never a pleasure, nor was it a pleasure to her to talk *with* me. I irritated her; she bored me.

How rarely in our country do you find a woman who is an interesting companion for a man, except as female and male pair or survey the prospect of pairing? And it matters not what line of activity the man is taking—business, politics, literature, art, philanthropy even. The women are eternally talking about their superiority to the business man; but do they get along any better with an artist—unless he is cultivating the woman for the sake of an order for a picture? Is there any line of serious endeavor in which an American woman is interesting and helpful and companionable to a man? I can get along very well with an artist. I have one friend who is a writer of novels, another who is a writer of plays, a third who is a sculptor. They



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

are interested in my work, and I in theirs. We talk together on a basis of equal interest, and we give each other ideas. Can any American woman say the same? I don't inquire anticipating a negative answer. I simply put the question. But I suspect the answer would put a pin in the bubble of the American woman's pretense of superior culture. She is fooled by her vanity, I fear, and by her sex attraction, and by the influence of the money her despised father or husband gives her. There's a reason why America is notoriously the land of bachelor husbands—and that reason is not the one the women and foreign fortune hunters assert. The American man lets the case go by default against him, not because he couldn't answer, nor yet because he is polite, but *because he is indifferent*.

But my wife was talking about her projected assault upon New York. "I really must be an extraordinary woman," said she. "How I have fought all these years to raise myself, with you dragging at me to keep me down."

"I?" protested her unhappy husband. "Why, dear, I've never opposed you in any way. And I've tried to do what I could to help you. You must admit the money's been useful."

"Oh, you've never been mean about money," conceded she. "But you don't sympathize with a single one of my ideals."

"I want you to have whatever you want," said I. "And anything I can do to get it for you, or to help you get it, I stand ready to do."

"Yes, I know, Godfrey, dear," said she, giving me

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

a long hug and a kiss. "No woman ever had a more generous husband than I have."

I naturally attached more importance to this burst of enthusiasm than I do now. And it is as well that I was thus simple-minded. How little pleasure we would get, to be sure, if, when we are praised or loved by anybody because we do that person's kindness, we paused to analyze and saw the shallow selfishness of such praise or such love. After all, it's only human nature to like those who do as we ask them and to dislike those who don't; and I am not quarreling with human nature—or with any other of the unchangeable conditions of the universe. My own love for Edna—what was it but the natural result of my getting what I wanted from her, all I wanted? I really troubled myself little about her incompetence and extravagance and craze for social position. No doubt to this day I should be— But I am again anticipating.

"Generous? Nonsense," said I. "It isn't generous to try to make you happy. That's my one chance of being happy myself. A busy man's got to have peace at home. If he hasn't he's like a soldier attacked rear and front at the same time."

"I know you don't care where we live," she went on. "And for Margot's sake we've simply got to move to New York."

"Oh, you want her to stay at home of nights, instead of living at the school. Why didn't you speak of that first?"

"Not at all," cried she. "How slow you are! No; for the present, even if we do live in New York, I think

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

it best for Margot to keep on living at the school. She's barely started there. I want her training to be thorough. And while I'm learning as fast as I can, I am not competent to teach her. I know, of course. But I haven't had the chance to practice. So I can't teach her."

"Teach her what?" I inquired.

"To be a lady—a practical, expert lady," replied Edna. "That's what she's going to Miss Ryper's school for. And when she comes out she'll be the equal of girls who have generations of culture and breeding behind them."

"God bless me!" cried I, laughing. "This Ryper woman must be a wonder."

"She is," declared Edna. "It was a great favor, her letting Margot into the school."

"Oh, I remember," said I. "She couldn't do it until I got two of the directors of the road to insist on it. But I guess that was merely a bluff of hers to squeeze us for a few hundreds extra."

"Not at all," Edna assured me. "You are *so* ignorant, Godfrey. Please do be careful not to say those coarse things before people."

"As you please," said I, cheerfully, for I was used to this kind of calling down. "All the same, the Ryper lady is hot for the dough."

Edna shivered. She detested slang—continued to detest and avoid it even after she learned that it was fashionable. "Miss Ryper guards her list of pupils as their mothers guard their visiting lists," said she. "But now she likes Margot. The dear child has been elected

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to the most exclusive fraternity. Every girl in it has to wear hand-made underclothes and has to have had at least a father, a grandfather, and a great grandfather." Edna laughed with pride at her own cleverness before she went on. "Margot came to me when she was proposed, and cried as if her little heart would break. She said she didn't know anything about her grandfather and great grandfather. But I hadn't forgotten to arrange that. I think of everything."

"Oh, that was easy enough," said I. "Your grandfather was a tailor and mine was in the grocery business like father."

Edna looked round in terror. "Sh!" she exclaimed. "Servants always listen." She went to the door—we were in the small upstairs sitting room—opened it suddenly, looked into the hall, closed the door, and returned to a chair nearer the lounge on which I was stretched comfortably smoking.

"What's the matter?" said I.

"No one was there," said she. "Haven't I told you never to speak of—of those horrible things?"

"But Margot——"

"Margot doesn't know. She must *never* know! Poor child, she is so sensitive, it would make her ill."

I lapsed into gloomy silence. I had not liked the way Edna had been acting about her parents and mine ever since we came to Brooklyn. But I had been busy, and was averse to meddling.

"I gave Margot for the benefit of the girls a genealogy I've gotten up," she went on. "You know all genealogies are more or less faked, and I've no doubt

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

hers is every bit as genuine as those of half the girls over there. I fixed ours so that it would take a lot of inquiry to expose it. And Margot got into the fraternity."

"Are the hand-made underclothes fake too?" said I.

"Oh, no. *They* had to be genuine. I've never let Margot wear any other kind since I learned about those things. There's nothing that gives a child such a sense of ladylikeness and superiority as to feel she's dressed right from the skin out."

"Well, school's a different sort of a place from what it was in our day," said I. The picture my wife had drawn amused me, but I somehow did not exactly like it. My mind was too little interested in the direction of the things that absorbed Edna for me to be able to put into any sort of shape the thoughts vaguely moving about in the shadows. "I'll bet," I went on, "poor Margot doesn't have as good a time as we had."

"She'd hate that kind of a time," said Edna.

I laughed and laid my hand in her lap. Her hand stole into it. I watched her lovely face—the sweet, dreamy expression. "What are you thinking?" said I softly, hopeful of romance—what *I* call romance.

"I was thinking how low and awful we used to be," replied she, "and how splendidly we are getting away from it."

I laughed, for I was used to cold water on my romance. "All the same," insisted I, "Margot would envy us if she knew."

"She'd hate it," Edna repeated. "She's going to be an improvement on *us*."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Not on you," I protested.

She looked at me with tender sparkling eyes, the same lovely light-brown eyes that had fascinated me as a boy. Brown eyes for a woman, always! But they must not be of the heavy commonplace shades of brown like a deer's or a cow's. They must have light shades in them, tints verging toward blue or green. Said Edna: "I'm doing my best to fit myself. And before I get through, Godfrey, I think I'll go far."

"Sure you will," said I, with no disposition to turn the cold douche on *her* kind of romance. What an idiot I was about her, to be sure! I went on: "And I'll see that you have the money to grease the toboggan slide and make the going easy."

She talked on happily and confidently: "Yes, it's best to leave Margot another year as a boarder at Miss Ryper's. By that time we'll be established over in New York, and we'll have a proper place for her to receive her friends. And perhaps we'll have a few friends of our own."

"Swell friends, eh?"

"Please don't say swell, dear," corrected she. "It's such a common word."

"I've heard *you* say it," I protested.

"But I don't any more. I've learned better. And now I've taught you better."

"Anything you like. Anybody you like," said I. When Edna and I were together, with our hands clasped, I was always completely under her spell. She could do what she pleased with me, so long, of course, as she didn't interfere in my end of the firm. And I may add

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

that she never did; she hadn't the faintest notion what I was about. They say there are thousands of American women in the cities who know their husbands' places of business only as street and telephone numbers. My wife was one of that kind. Oh, yes, from the standpoint of those who insist that business and home should be separate, we were a model couple.

"There's another matter I want to talk over with you, Godfrey," she went on.

"That's a lovely dress you're wearing," said I. "It goes so well with your skin and your hair."

She was delighted, and was moved to rise and look at herself in the long mirror. She gave herself an approving glance, but not more approving than what she saw merited. A long, slim beautiful figure; a dress that set it off. A lovely young tip-tilted face, the face of a girl with fresh, clear eyes and skin, the whitest, evenest sharp teeth—and such hair!—such quantities of hair attractively arranged.

From herself she glanced at me. "No one'd ever think what we came from, would they?" said she fondly and proudly. "Oh, Godfrey, it makes me so happy that we *look* the part. We belong where we're going. The good blood away back in the family is coming out. And Margot— I've always called her the little duchess—and she looks it and feels it." Dreamily, "Maybe she will be some day."

"Why, she's a baby," cried I. For I didn't like to see that my baby was growing up.

"She's nearly fourteen," said Edna. She was looking at herself again. "Would you ever think I had a

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

daughter fourteen years old?" said she, making a laughing, saucy face at me.

I got up and kissed her. "You don't look as old as you did when I married you," said I, and it was only a slight exaggeration.

When we sat again, she was snuggled into my lap with her head against my shoulder. She was immensely fond of being petted. They say this is no sign of a loving nature, that cats, the least loving of all pets, are fondest of petting. I have no opinion on the subject.

"What was it you wanted to talk about?" said I. "Money?"

"No, indeed," laughed she.

"I supposed so, as that's the only matter in which I have any influence in this family."

"Come to think of it," said she, "it is money—in a way. It's about—our parents." She gave a deep sigh. "Godfrey, they hang over me like a nightmare!"

Her tragic seriousness amused me. "Oh, cheer up," said I, kissing her. "They certainly don't fit in with our stylishness. But they're away off there in Passaic, and bother us as little as we bother them. The truth is, Edna, we've not acted right. We've been selfish—spending all our prosperity on ourselves. Of course, they've got everything they really want, but—well——"

"That's exactly it," said she eagerly. "My conscience has been hurting me. We ought to—to— It wouldn't cost much to make them perfectly comfortable—so they'd not have to work—and could get away from the grocery—and the—and the"—she hesitated before saying "father's business," as if nerving her-



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

self to pronounce words of shame. And when she did finally force out the evading "father's business," it was with such an accent that I couldn't help laughing outright.

"Undertaking's a good-paying business," said I. "We certainly ought to be grateful to it. It supplied the eight thousand dollars that gave me the chance to buy half the rolling mill. And you know the rolling mill was the start of our fortune."

"Do you think father could be induced to retire?" she asked.

"Never," said I. "Your father's a rich man, for Passaic. He's got two hundred thousand at least hived away in tenements that pay from twenty to thirty-five per cent. And his business now brings in ten to fifteen thousand a year straight along."

"You can make *your* father retire?"

I laughed. "Poor dad! I've been keeping him from being retired by the sheriff. He's squeezing out a bare living. He'd be delighted to stop and have all his time for talking politics and religion."

"You could buy them a nice place a little way out in the country, on some quiet road. I'm sure your mother and your old maid sister would love it."

"Perhaps," said I. "If it wasn't *too* quiet."

"But it must be quiet. And we'll induce my father and mother to buy a place near by."

"Your father'll not give up the business."

"I've thought it all out," said Edna, whose mind was equal to whatever task she gave it. "You must get some one to offer him a price he simply can't refuse."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

and make a condition that he shall not go into business again. Aren't those things done?"

I was somewhat surprised, but not much, at the knowledge of business this displayed. "Why!—Why!" laughed I. "And you pretend to know nothing about business!"

She was in a sensible, loving mood that day. So she said with a quiet little laugh: "I make it a point to know anything that's useful to me. I don't know much about business. Why should I bother with it? I've got confidence in you."

It was not the first time I had got a peep into her mind and had seen how she looked on everyone, including me, as a wheel in her machine, and never interfered unless the wheel didn't work to suit her. I laughed delightedly. There was something charmingly feminine, thought I, about this point of view so upside down. "Yes, I guess your father'll jump for the bait you suggest," said I. "But why disturb him? He loves his undertaking."

She shivered.

"And he'll be miserable idling about."

"Oh, I guess he'll get along all right," said she, with sarcasm and with truth. "He'll devote himself to suing his tenants and counting his money. . . . Godfrey, you simply must get those people in Passaic out of our way. I've been a little nervous over here, though I knew that none of these dreadful people we associate with has anything better in the way of family than us, and some have a lot worse. Oh, it's *frightful* to have parents one's ashamed of!"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I think I blushed. I'm sure I looked away to avoid seeing her expression. "It's frightful to be ashamed of one's parents," said I.

"Now don't be hypocritical," cried she. "You know perfectly well you are ashamed of your parents, as I am of mine."

"I'll admit," said I, "that if they showed up at the office, I'd be a bit upset and would feel apologetic. But I'm ashamed of myself for feeling that way."

"If you only realized about things," said she, which was her phrase for hitting at me as lacking in refined instincts, "you'd not be ashamed of yourself, but would frankly suffer. They are a disgrace to us."

"They're honest people, well meaning, and as good as the best in every essential way," said I. "Believe me, Edna, the fault isn't in them. It's in us. Suppose you found some day that Margot was ashamed of you and me."

"But she'll not be," retorted Edna. "I for one will see to it that she has no cause to be anything but proud."

I couldn't but admit that there were two sides to the problem of our parents. It was shameful to be ashamed of them. But it was also human. I couldn't—and can't—utterly damn in Edna a fault, a vulgar weakness, I myself had, and almost everyone I knew. No doubt, gentle reader, you are scandalized and disgusted. But one of my objects in relating this whole story is to scandalize and to disgust you. You have had too much consideration at the hands of writers—you and your hypocritical virtues and your hysterical

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

nerves. If you are an American, you are probably far in advance of your parents in worldly knowledge, in education, in every way except perhaps manly and womanly self-respect. For along with your progress has come an infection of snobbishness and toadyism that seems in some mysterious way inseparable from higher civilization. So be shocked and disgusted with Edna and me, and don't turn your hypocritical eyes inward on your own secret thoughts and actions about your own humble parents. Above all, don't learn from this horrifying episode a decenter mode of thinking and feeling—and acting.

"We must get them out of the way before we move to New York," said Edna. "Ever since Margot began at Mrs. Ryper's I've been on pins and needles. You don't know how malicious fashionable people are. Why, some of them who have nothing to do might at any time run out to Passaic and see for themselves."

Edna was sitting up in my lap, gazing at me with wide harassed-looking eyes. I burst out laughing. "They might take a camera along, and get some snapshots," I suggested.

Edna's face contracted with horror and her form grew limp and weak. "My God!" she cried. "So they might. Godfrey, we must attend to it at once."

### III

I HAVE never been able to come to a satisfactory verdict as to the intelligence of the human race. Is it stupid, or is it, rather, sluggish? Is it unable to think, or does it refuse to think? Does it believe the follies it pretends to believe and usually acts upon, or is it the victim of its own willful prejudices and hypocrisies? Never have I decided that a certain man or woman was practically witless, but that he or she has confounded me by saying or doing something indicating shrewdness or even wisdom.

The women are especially difficult to judge. Take Edna, for example.

It was impossible to interest her in anything worth while. But as to the things in which she was interested, none could have thought more clearly or keenly, or could have acted with more vigor and effect. I have often made serious blunders—inexcusable blunders—in managing my own affairs. To go no further, my management of my family would have convicted me of imbecility before any court not made up of good-natured, indifferent, woman-worshipping, woman-despising American husbands. Yes, I have made the stupidest blunders in all creation. But I cannot recall a single notable blunder made by Edna in the matters which

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

alone she deemed worthy of her attention. She decided what she wanted. She moved upon it by the best route, whether devious or direct or a combination of the two. And she always got it.

You may say her success was due to the fact that her objects were trivial. But if you will think a moment, you will appreciate that a thing's triviality does not necessarily make it easy to attain. As much energy and skill may be shown in winning a sham battle as in winning a real. Still, I suppose minds are cast in molds of various sizes, and one cast in a small mold can deal only with the small. And I guess that, from whatever cause, the minds of women are of diverse kinds of smaller molds. Perhaps this is the result of bad education. Perhaps better education will correct it. I do not know. I can speak only of what is—of Edna as she is and always has been.

Having made up her mind to fell the genealogical tree, that an artificial one might be stood up in its place, she lost no time in getting into action.

It was on the Sunday following our talk—the earliest possible day—that she took me for the first visit we had made our parents in nearly three years. We had sent them presents. We had written them letters. We had received painfully composed and ungrammatical replies—these received both for Edna and myself at my office, because she feared the servants would pry into periodically arriving exhibits of illiteracy. We had written them of coming and bringing Margot with us. We had received suggestions of their coming to see us, which Edna had evaded by such excuses as that we were

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

moving or that she or Margot was not well or that the cook had abruptly deserted. The world outside Passaic was a vague place to our old fathers and mothers. Their own immediate affairs kept them busy. So with no sense of deliberate alienation on their side and small and mildly intermittent sense of it on our side, the months and the years passed without our seeing one another.

Edna announced to me the intended visit only an hour before we started. It was a habit of hers—a clever habit, too—never to take anyone into her confidence about her plans until the right moment—that is, the moment when execution was so near at hand that discussion would seem futile. At a quarter before nine on that Sunday morning she said:

“Don’t dress for church. This is a good day to make that trip to Passaic.”

“We’ll go by Miss Ryper’s for Margot,” said I. “How the old people will stare when they see her!”

Edna looked at me as if I had suddenly uncovered unmistakable evidence of my insanity. Then I who had clean forgot her foolish notions remembered. “But why not?” I urged. “It will give them so much pleasure.”

“Trash!” ejaculated she. “They don’t care a rap about her. They can’t, as they’ve not seen her since she was a baby. And Margot would suffer horribly. I think it would be wicked to give a sweet, happy young girl a horrible shock.”

This grotesque view of the effect of the sight of grandparents upon a grandchild struck me as amusing. But there was no echo of my laughter in the disgusted

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

face of my wife. I sobered and said: "Yes, it would give her a shock. We've made a mistake, bringing her up in that way."

"Too late to discuss it now," said Edna.

"I suppose so," I could not but agree. "I guess the mischief's done beyond repair."

Said Edna: "Have you any sense of—of them being *your* father and mother?"

"Rather," said I. "My childhood is very vivid to me, and not at all disagreeable."

"It seems to me like a bad dream—unreal, and to be forgotten as quickly as I can."

She said this with a fine, spiritual look in her eyes, and I must say that Edna, refined, delicately beautiful, fashionably dressed, speaking her English with an elegant accent, did not suggest fusty-dusty, queer-looking Weeping Willie with his hearse and funeral coaches, his embalming apparatus and general appearance of animated casket, nor yet fat, sloppy Ma Wheatlands, always in faded wrappers and with holes cut in her shoes for her bunions.

"Wear your oldest business suit," said Edna, coming back to earth from the contemplation of her own elevation and grandeur. "I shall dress as quietly as I dare. We mustn't arouse the suspicions of the servants."

Edna's fooleries amused me. I didn't then appreciate the dangers of tolerating and laughing at the bad habits of a fascinating child. If I had, little good I'd have accomplished, I suspect. However, I got myself up as Edna directed, and when I saw how it irritated



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

her I stopped making such remarks as: "Shall I wear a collar? Hadn't I better sneak out the back way and join you at the ferry?" I should have liked to get some fun out of our doings; that would have taken at least the saw edge off my feelings of self-contempt. I am not fond of hypocrisy, yet for that one occasion I should have welcomed the familiar human shamming and faking in such matters. But Edna would put the thing through like one of her father's funerals. As we, in what was practically disguise, issued forth, she said loudly enough for the cocking ear of a maid who chanced to be in the front hall:

"Anyhow, the country dust won't spoil these clothes. I'm so glad it's clear. How charming the woods will look."

Just enough to deceive. Edna expanded upon her cleverness in never saying too much, because saying too much always started people, especially servants, to thinking. But she abruptly checked her flow of self-praise as we seated ourselves in the ferry and she looked about. There, not a dozen seats away, loomed our cook! Yes, no mistake, it was our Mary, "gotten up regardless" for a Sunday outing.

"Do you see Mary?" said my wife.

"She's the most conspicuous female in sight," said I. "She's a credit to us."

"I must have been mad," groaned Edna, "to give her a holiday! Always the way. I never do a generous, kind-hearted thing that I don't have to pay for it."

"I don't follow you," said I.

"She hates us," explained Edna. "Cooks—Irish

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

cooks—invariably hate the families they draw wages from. She's dogging us."

"Nonsense," said I. "She probably hasn't even seen us."

But Edna was not listening; she was contriving. "We must let her leave the boat ahead of us. Pretend not to see her."

I obeyed orders. In the Jersey City train shed we, lagging behind, saw her take a train bound for a different destination from ours. Much relieved, Edna led the way to the Passaic train. Hardly were we seated when in at the door of the coach hurried our Mary, excited and blown. She came beaming down the aisle. Edna saluted her graciously and calmly.

"I got in the wrong train," said Mary. "It'd never have took me nowheres near my cousin in Passaic."

Edna's composure was admirable. Said I, when Mary had passed on, "Now what, my dear?"

"You see she *is* dogging us," replied Edna. "I've not a doubt she knows all about us."

"I don't *think* she's got a camera," said I. "Still, they make them very small nowadays."

"We shall have to go on in the train, and return home from the station beyond," said Edna.

"Do as you like," said I. "But as for me, I get off at Passaic and go to see the old folks."

"Please stop your joking," said Edna. "If you had any pride you couldn't joke."

"I am serious," said I. "I shall go to see mother and father."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"No doubt her cousin lives in the same part of the slums," said Edna. "Oh, it is *hideous!*"

I don't know what possessed me—whether a fit of indigestion and obstinacy or a sudden access of sense of decency as I approached my old home. Whatever it was, it moved me to say: "My dear, this nonsense has gone far enough. We will do what we set out to do."

"Not I," said Edna.

"Then I'll drop off at Passaic alone, and hire a trap, and give Mary a seat in it as far as her cousin's. I'm not proud of my parents, the more shame to me. But there's a limit to my ability to degrade myself."

Edna and I had not lived together all those years without her learning the tone I use when I will not be trifled with. She did not argue. She sat silent and pale beside me. When the train stopped at Passaic she followed me from the car. Mary descended ahead of us and moved off at as brisk a pace as tight corsets and stiff new shoes would permit, in a direction exactly opposite that we were to take.

"Aren't you glad we didn't go on?" said I, eager to make it up.

She made no reply. She maintained haughty and injured silence until we were within sight of the houses. Then she said curtly:

"I'll do the talking about our plans for them."

"That'll be best," said I, most conciliatory.

I had not intended to say this. There had been a half-formed resolution in my mind to oppose those plans. But her anger roused in me such a desire to pacify her

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

that I promptly yielded, where, I must in honesty confess, I was little short of indifferent. American husbands have the reputation of being the most docile and the worst henpecked men in the world. All foreigners say so, and our women believe it. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The docility of American husbands is the good nature of indifference. A friend of mine has the habit of saying that his most valued and most valuable possession is his long list of things he cares not a rap about. It is a typically American and luminous remark. The men of other nations agitate over trifles, love to have the sense of being master at home—usually their one and only chance for a free swing at the joyous feeling of being boss. The American man, absorbed in his important work at office or factory, and not caring especially about anything else, lets thieving politicians rule in public affairs, lets foolish, incompetent women rule in domestic affairs. He has a half-conscious philosophy that he is shrewd enough, if he attends to his business, to make money faster than they can take it away from him, and that, if he does not attend to his business only, he will have nothing either for thieving politician and spendthrift wife or for himself. If you wish to discover how little there is in the notion of his docility, meddle with something he really cares about. Many a political rascal, many a shiftless wife, has done it and has gotten a highly disagreeable surprise.

Perhaps what I saw had as much to do with my tame acquiescence in my wife's projects as my desire to have peace between her and me, when peace meant

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

yielding what only a vague and feeble filial impulse moved me to contest. I had what I thought was a clear and vivid memory of my natal place and Edna's—how the two houses looked, how small and shabby they were, how mean their surroundings, how plain their interiors. But as we drove up I discovered that memory had been pleasantly deceiving me. Could these squalid hovels, these tiny, hideous boxes set in two dismal weedy oblongs of unkempt yards—could these be our old homes? And the bent old laboring man and his wife—we had drawn up in front of my home—could they be *my* father and *my* mother?

A feeling of sickness, of nausea came over me. Not from repulsion for my parents—thank God, I had not sunk that low. But from abhorrence of myself, so degraded by the “higher world” into which prosperity and Edna's ambitions had dragged me that I could look down upon the gentle old man and the patient, loving old woman to whom I owed life and a fair start in the world. My blood burned and my eyes sank as they greeted me, their homely old hands trembling, their mouths distorted by emotion and age and missing teeth. I turned away while they were kissing Edna, for I felt I should hate her and loathe myself if I saw the expression that must be in her face.

“There are my father and mother!” she cried in a suffocating voice. And we three Loring's were watching her hurry across the yard and through the gap in the fence between the two places. My sister came forward. We kissed each other as awkwardly as two strangers. I looked at her dazedly. Mary, our cook, was an impos-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ing looking lady beside this thin-haired, coarse-featured old maid. In embarrassed silence we four entered the house. I am not tall nor in the least fat, yet I had an uncontrollable impulse to stoop and to squeeze as I entered the squat and narrow doorway. That miserable little "parlor!"

As we sat silent my roving glance at last sought my mother's face. Oh, the faces, the masks, with which freakish and so often savagely ironic fate covers and hides our souls, making fair seem foul and foul seem fair, making beauty repellent and ugliness seem beautiful. Suddenly through that plain, time- and toil-scarred mask, through those dim, sunken eyes, I saw her soul—her mother's heart—looking at me. And the tears poured into my eyes. "Mother!" I sobbed in a choking voice, and I put my arms round her and nestled against her heart, a boy again—a bad boy with a streak of good in him. I felt how proud she—they all—were of me, the son and brother, who had gone forth and fulfilled the universal American dream of getting up in the world. I hoped, I prayed that they would not realize what a poor creature I was, with my snobbish shame.

There was an awkward, rambling attempt at talk. But we had nothing to talk about—nothing in common. I happened to think of our not having brought Margot; how shameful it was, yet how glad I felt, and how self-contemptuous for being glad. To break that awful silence I enlarged upon Margot—her beauty, her cleverness.

"She must be like Polly"—my sister's name was

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Polly—"like Polly was at her age," observed my mother.

I looked at Polly Ann, in whose faded face and withered form—faded and withered though she was not yet forty, was in fact but seven or eight years older than I. Like Polly! I could speak no more of Margot, the delicate loveliness of a rare, carefully reared hot-house exotic. Yes, exotic; for the girls and the women brought up in the super-refinements of prosperous class silliness seem foreign to this world—and are.

A few minutes that seemed hours, and Edna came in, her father and mother limping and hobbling in her train. Edna was sickly pale and her eyelids refused to rise. I shook hands with old Willie Wheatlands, hesitated, then kissed the fat, sallow, swinging cheek of my mother-in-law. Said Edna in a hard, forced voice:

"I've explained that Margot isn't well and that we've got to get back——"

"Mercy me!" cried my mother. "Ain't you going to stay to supper?"

Supper! It was only half-past twelve. Supper could not be until five or half past. We had been there half an hour and already conversation was exhausted and time had become motionless.

"We intended to," said Edna. "But Margot wasn't at all well when we left. We simply can't stay away long. We'd not have come, but we felt we'd never get here if we kept on letting things interfere."

"You didn't leave Margy *alone*?" demanded Edna's mother.

"Almost," said Edna. "Only a—a servant."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Oh, you keep a nurse girl, too," said Polly. "I thought Edna didn't look as if she did any of her own work."

"Yes, I have a—a girl, in addition to the cook," replied Edna, flushing as she thus denied three of her five servants—flushing not because of the denial, but because in her confession she had almost forgotten about the numerous excuses based on the cook. "Godfrey has been doing very well, and we felt we could afford it."

"Better get rid of her," advised old Willie sourly. "And of the cook, too. Servant girls is mighty wasteful."

"And she'll teach Margy badness," said my mother. "Them servants is full of poison. Even if yer pa'd had money I'd never have allowed no servant round my children, no more'n a snake in the cradle. I hope she's a good Christian, and not a Catholic?"

"She's all right," declared Edna nervously. "But we'll have to be going soon."

"Yes; that there girl might git drunk," said Mrs. Wheatlands.

"And set fire to the house maybe," said my mother. "I heard of a case just last week."

"I wish you hadn't said that," cried Edna, her tones of protest more like jubilation. "I'll be wretched until I'm home again."

Mother told in detail and with rising excitement the story of the drunken nurse girl who had burned up herself and her charges, a pair of lovely twins. From that moment our families were anxious for us to go. The



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

three women could see the girl drunk and the house burning. The two grandfathers, while less imaginative, were almost as uneasy. Besides, no doubt our families found us full as tiring as we found them.

"But before we go," said Edna, in a business-like tone, "there's one thing we wanted to talk about. Godfrey has had—that is, he has done very well in business. And of course our first thought—one of our first thoughts—was what could we do for you all down here. We hate to think of your living in this unhealthy part of the town. We want to see you settled in some healthful place, up in the hills."

We were watching the faces of our five kinsfolk. We could make nothing of their expression. It was heavy, dull—mere listening, without a hint of even comprehension behind.

"We thought you, father, and Mr.—father Loring—might look round and find a nice farm with a big comfortable house—plenty big enough for you all—and Godfrey will buy it, and will pay for a man and a woman to look after you. He has done well, as I said, and he can afford it. In fact, they've made him president of the railroad."

My father, my mother, and my sister exchanged glances. A long, awed silence. Old Willie spoke in his squeaky, stinging voice: "I can't leave my business. I ain't footless like Loring there. *My* business pays."

"You can sell it," said Edna. "You know you ought to retire. You were telling me how bad your health had been."

"Nobody else couldn't make nothing like what I

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

make out of it. The men growing up nowadays ain't no account. The no-account women with heads full of foolishness leads 'em off."

Edna agreed with him, pointed out that he'd have to give up soon anyhow, appealed to his cupidity for real estate by expanding upon the size and value of the farm I was willing to give him. She made a strong impression. The women were converted by the prospect of having help with the work. My father had long dreamed of a home in the country. He had not the imagination to picture how he would be bored, away from the loafers with whom he talked politics and religion. "And," said Edna, "you'll have horses and things to ride in, so you can go where you please whenever you please."

We had roused them. We had dazzled them. It was plain that if a purchaser could be found for the Wheatlands undertaking business, Edna would carry her point. "Godfrey will look for somebody to take the business," said she to her father. "I want you and Father Loring to start out to-morrow morning, and not stop till you've found a farm."

I understood an uncertain gleam in old Willie's eyes. "About the price," said I, speaking for the first time, "I'm willing to pay twenty-five thousand down for the place alone, and as I'll pay cash, you ought to be able on mortgage to get a farm—or two or three adjoining farms—that would cost twice that."

The two families were dumbfounded.

"I know I can trust you, Mr. Wheatlands, to get the money's worth."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Buy a big place," said Edna, of the unexpected timely shrewdnesses. "Go back from the main roads where land's so dear."

Wheatlands nodded. "That's a good idea," said he. "There'll be plenty of roads after a while."

Edna was ready to depart. "Then it's settled?" said she.

Her father nodded. "I'm willing to see what can be done. But I'd rather not have Ben Loring along. He'd interfere with a good bargain."

"Yes, you go alone, Willie," said my father. "Anyhow, I've got to 'tend store. I can't afford a boy any more."

The mention of the, to them, enormous sum of money had put them in a state of awe as to Edna and me. It saddened me to observe how quickly the weed of snobbishness, whose seeds are in all human nature, sprang up and dominated the whole garden. They lost the sense of our blood kinship with them. They felt that we, able to dispense such splendid largess, were of a superior order of being. And I saw that my and Edna's feeling of strangeness toward them was intimacy beside the feeling of strangeness toward us which they now had. In my dealings with my fellow beings I have often noted this sort of thing—that the snobbishness of those who look down is a weak and hesitating impulse which would soon die out but for the encouragement it gets from the snobbishness of those who look up. I read somewhere, "Caste is made by those who look up, not by those who look down." That is a great truth, and like most great, simple, obvious truths is usually overlooked.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Looking back I see that my own first decisive impulse toward the caste feeling came that day, came when my people and Edna's, discovering that we were rich, began to treat us as lower class treats upper class.

My mother had been scrutinizing me for signs of the majesty of wealth. "Why don't you wear a beard, or leastways a mustache, Godfrey?" she finally inquired. "Then you wouldn't seem so boyish like."

"I used to wear a mustache," said I, "but I cut it off because—I don't recall why."

In fact I did recall. I noted one day that I had a good mouth and better teeth than most men have. And it came to me how absurd it was to hang a bunch of hair from my upper lip to trail in the soup and to embalm the odors of past cigars for the discomfort of my nose. Edna kept after me for a time to let it grow again. But reading in some novel she regarded as authoritative that mustaches were "common," she desisted. And I found my boyish appearance highly useful. It led men to underestimate me—a signal advantage in the contests of wit against wit in which I daily engaged with a view to wrenching a fortune for myself away from my fellow men.

My mother went on to urge me to make my face look older and more formidable. Now that she had learned what a grand person I was she feared others would not realize it. Edna, who, as I have said, was shrewdness personified where her own interests were involved, immediately saw the dangerous bearings of this newly aroused vanity of our kin. "I forgot to caution you," said she, "not to mention our prosperity. If we

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

were talked about now, it might be lost entirely. The only reason Godfrey and I came to you so soon with the news of it was because we wanted to do something for you right away. And we knew we could trust you not to get us into trouble. Don't talk about us. If you hear people talking, if they ask you questions, pretend you don't understand and don't know. You see, it may be spies from our enemies."

One glance round that circle of eager faces was enough to convince that Edna had made precisely the impression she desired. I could see that my mother and old Weeping Willie, the shrewd of the five—the two to whom Edna and I owed most by inheritance—were prepared to deny knowing us if that would aid in safeguarding the precious prosperity. My father and sister were obviously disappointed that they could not go about boasting of our magnificence and getting from the neighbors the envy and respect due the near relations of a plutocrat. But there was no danger of their being indiscreet; Edna could breathe freely. And when the two families were tucked away in the midst of a large and secluded farm, she could tell what genealogical stories she pleased without fear of being confounded by the truth.

By three o'clock we were back in Brooklyn. Edna felt and looked triumphant. The crowning of the day's work had been small but significant. A heavy rain storm that came up while we were on the way back must have made the servants think we had cut short our woodland outing. As we were going to bed that night Edna roused herself from deep study and broke

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

a long silence with, "I hesitated whether to tell them you had become president of the road."

I had noted that seeming slip of hers, so unlike her cautious reticence.

"Then I remembered they'd be sure to see it in the papers," continued she. "And I decided it was best to tell and quiet them."

While the old folks were industriously settling themselves in the New Jersey woods— Here let me relieve my mind by saying a few words in mitigation of the unfilial and snobbish conduct of Edna and me. I admit we deserve nothing but condemnation. I admit I am more to blame than she because I could have compelled her to act better toward our families, though of course I could not have changed her feelings—or my own, for that matter. But, as often happens in this world, the thing that was in motive shameful turned out well. We and our families had grown hopelessly apart. Inter-course with them could not but have been embarrassing and uncomfortable for both sides. When we got them the farm, got them away from the malarial and squalid part of Passaic into a healthful region where they lived in much better health and in a comfort they could appreciate, we did the best possible thing for them, as well as for ourselves. Do not think for a moment that because I am ashamed of my snobbish motives I am therefore advocating the keeping up of irksome and absurd ties merely out of wormy sentimentality. It has always seemed to me, when we have but the one chance at life, the one chance to make the best of our

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

talents and opportunities, that only moral or mental weakness, or both, would waste the one chance in the bondage of outworn ties. When one has outgrown any association, lop it off relentlessly, say I. If the living lets the dying cling to it, the dying does not live but the living dies. If you are associated with anyone in any way—business, social, ties of affection, whatever you please—and if you do not wish to lose that one, then keep yourself alive and abreast of him or her. And if you let yourself begin to decay and find yourself cut away, whose is the fault, if fault there be? We—Edna and I—perhaps did not do all we might to make our outgrown families happy; I say perhaps, though I am by no means sure that we did not do all that was in our power, for they certainly would have got no pleasure out of seeing more of two people so uncongenial to them in every respect. At any rate, we did not leave our families to starve or to suffer. Hard though my charming, lovely wife was, I cannot conceive her sinking to that depth. On the whole, I feel that we could honestly say we took the right course with them. That is, we helped them without hindering ourselves. We did the right thing, though not in the right way.

While our families were choosing a farm, were fixing up the buildings to suit their needs and tastes, were moving themselves from their ancient haunts, Edna was as industriously busy making far deeper inroads on the new prosperity. She was planning the conquest of New York.

Every day in the year many a suddenly enriched

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

family is busy about the same enterprise. Families from the less fashionable parts of the city moving to the fashionable parts. Families from other cities and towns—east, west, north, and south—advancing to social conquest under the leadership of mamas and daughters tired of shining in obscure, monotonous, and unappreciative places. There are I forget how many thousands of millionaires on Manhattan Island; enough, I know, with the near millionaires and those living like millionaires, to make a city of three or four hundred thousand, not including servants and parasites. Not all of these have the fashionable craze; at least, they haven't it in its worst form—the form in which it possessed my wife. All the acute sufferers must find suitable lodgments near Fifth Avenue if not in it.

Now New York is ever ready to receive and to “trim” the arriving millionaire. It has all kinds of houses and apartments to meet the peculiarities of his—or, rather, of his wife's and daughter's—notions of grandeur. It has a multitude of purveyors of furnishings and decorations likewise designed to catch crude and grandiose tastes. My wife was busy with these gentry.

“Don't you think we'd better go a little slow?” said I. “Why not live in a hotel on Manhattan and look about us?”

I had respect for my wife's capacity at the woman side of the game; she had thoroughly drilled me to more than generous appreciation of it. But at the same time I was not so blinded by her charm for me or so convinced by her insistent and plausible egotism that I had not



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

noted certain minor failures of hers due to her ignorance of the art of spending money. She was clever at learning. But often her vanity lured her into fancying she knew, when in fact her education in that particular direction was all miseducation. She dressed much more giddily in our first years in Brooklyn than she did afterwards. And in the later years she made still further discoveries as to dress that resulted in another revolution, away from quietness, not toward the gaudy but toward smartness—that curious quality which makes a woman's toilet conspicuous without the least suggestion of the loud.

However, Edna scorned my suggestion that she make haste slowly. She had long been engaged in a thorough study of the mode of life in millionairessdom. Newspapers, Sunday supplements, magazines, and society novels had helped her. She had examined the exteriors of the famous palaces. She had got into the drawing-rooms and ballrooms of two or three palaces by way of high-priced charity tickets. She had in one instance roamed into sitting rooms, bedrooms, bath-rooms until caught and led back by some vigilant and unbribable servant. I wonder if she ever recalls that adventure now! Probably not. I think I have recorded her ability absolutely to forget whatever it pleases her not to remember. She had been educating herself, so when I suggested caution, she replied:

“Don't you fret, Godfrey. I know what I'm about. I'll get what we've got to have.”

And I'll concede that she did—also, that I thought it overwhelmingly grand at the time. It was a house

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

in a fashionable side street, between Madison avenue and Fifth—a magnificent house built for exactly such a family as mine. That is, it was built entirely for show and not at all for comfort; it fairly bristled with the luxuries and “modern conveniences,” but most of them were of the sort that looks comfortable but is not. The rent was some preposterous sum—thirty-five or forty thousand a year. We had room enough for the housing of nearly a hundred people, counting servants as people, which I believe is not the custom. It was fitted throughout in the fashion which those clever leeches who think out and sell luxuries have in all ages imposed upon the rich man because it means money in their pockets. Once in a while you find a rich man who has the courage to live as he pleases, but most of them live as the fashion commands. And many of them have no idea that there is any less comfortless and less foolish way to live. You imagine, gentle reader, that people with money live in beauty and comfort. You imagine that you could do it also if you had but the wealth. Believe me, you deceive yourself. Beyond question a certain amount of money is necessary to the getting of attractive and comfortable surroundings. But there is another, an equally indispensable and a far rarer factor. That factor, gentle reader, is intelligence—knowledge of the resources of civilization, knowledge of the realities as to comfort, luxury, and taste.

I am tempted to linger upon the details of the extravagance of that first big establishment of Edna's. It was so astounding and so ridiculous. I saw that she had delivered us and our fortune over to hordes of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

crafty, thirsty bloodsuckers—merchants, tradesmen, servants. But her heart was set upon it, and all other rich people were living in that same way. "You want to do the right thing by Margot, don't you?" said she.

"By you and Margot," said I. "Go ahead. I guess I can find the money."

I shan't here go into the ways I discovered or invented for finding that money. They were not too scrupulous, but neither were they commercially dishonorable. I must smile there. Being of an inquiring and jocose mind I have often tried to find an action that, in the opinion of the most eminent commercial authorities, was absolutely dishonorable. Never yet have I found a single action, however wrong and even criminal in general, that they would not declare in certain circumstances perfectly honorable. And those "certain circumstances" could always be boiled down to the one circumstance—needing the money.

I can't recall exactly how many servants we had to wait on us two, but it was about thirty-five. I remember hearing my wife say one month that our meat bill alone was about a thousand dollars. For a time I fancied we were living more grandly than anyone else in town. But it soon revealed itself to me that, as things went with "our class," we were leading rather a simple life. Certainly nothing we did marked us out from the others in that region. The sum totals suggested that servants stood at the front windows all day long tossing money into the street. But nothing of the kind occurred. You would have said we ate the finest food in wholesale quantities. Yet never did I get a notably good meal at

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

my own house. The coffee was always poor. The fruit was below the average of sidewalk stands. We often had cold-storage fowls and fish on the table. We paid for the best; I'm sure we paid for it many times over. We got—what one always gets when the wife is too intellectual and too busy to attend to her business. But I assure you it was grandly served. The linen and the dishes were royal, the servants were in liveries of impressive color and form—though I could have wished that my wife had been as sensitive to odors as I was, and had compelled some of those magnificent gentry to do a little bathing. Throughout the establishment the same superb scale was maintained. We lived like the rest of the millionaires, neither better nor worse. We lived in grandeur and discomfort. But my wife was ecstatic, and I was therefore content. Yes, we were very grand. And, as in Brooklyn, the glasses came to the table with a certain sour odor not alluring as you lifted them to drink—the odor that causes an observant man or woman to say, “Aha—dirty rags in this perfect lady's kitchen—dirty rags and all that goes with them.” But only a snarling cynic would complain of these vulgar trifles. There's always at least a fly leg in the ointment.

“Didn't I tell you I knew what I was about?” said Edna triumphantly.

“You did,” said I.

“Haven't we got what we wanted?”

“We have,” said I, perhaps somewhat abruptly, for I was just then wondering how the devil we were going to keep it.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"And if it hadn't been for me," proceeded she, "we'd still be living in *Brooklyn!*"

"Or in Passaic," said I.

"Don't *speak* of Passaic," she cried. "I'm trying to forget it."

"We were very happy then," said I.

"I was miserable," retorted she.

"I could find it in my heart to wish we weren't *always* attended by servants," said I. "I almost never see you alone."

"What a bourgeois you are," laughed she. Then—after a thorough glance round to make sure house-keeper or maid or lackey wasn't on watch—she patted my cheek and kissed me, and added: "But you do make me happy. I'm *so* proud of you! No matter what I want I'm never afraid to buy it, for I know you can get all the money you want to."

I winced. Said I: "I'm afraid you'd not be proud of some of the ways I get the money."

She frowned. "Don't talk business, please," she said. "You know we never have in all our married life. You've always respected my position as your wife. All business is low—is mere sordidness."

"Yes, it's all low," said I. "Sometimes I think all living is low as well. Edna"—I put my arm round her—"don't you ever feel that we'd be *really* happy, that we'd get something genuine out of life—if you and Margot and I——"

She stopped my mouth with a kiss. "You never will grow up to your station, darling."

I said no more. Indeed, it was on hastiest impulse

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

that I had said so much, an impulse sprung from a mood of depression.

The cause of that mood was a nasty reverse in Wall Street. It had rudely halted me in my triumphant way toward the security of the man of many millions. It had set me to wavering uncertainly, with the chances about even for resuming the march and for tumbling into the abyss of a discreditable bankruptcy.

There are in New York two well-defined classes of the rich—the permanently rich and the precariously rich. The permanently rich are those who by the vastness of their wealth or by the strength of their business and social connections cannot possibly be dislodged from the plutocracy. The precariously rich are those who have much money and are making more, but are not strong enough to survive a series of typhoons, and are without the support of indissoluble business and social connections. My friend G——, for example, head of the famous banking house, associated in business and by marriage with half the permanent plutocracy, was practically bankrupt in the late panic. Had he been a man of ordinary position he would have gone into bankruptcy, and, I more than suspect, into jail. But his fellow plutocrats dared not let him drop, much as they would have liked to see his arrogance brought low, much as they longed to divide among themselves his holdings of gilt-edged securities; if he had gone down it would have made the whole financial world tremble. He was saved. On the other hand, my friend J——, richer actually, was ruined, was plucked by his associates, was finally jailed for doing precisely the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

things every man of finance did over and over again in that same period of stress—for, what invariably happens to moral codes in periods of stress?

I was at that time—but not now, gentle reader, so cheer up and read on—I was at that time in the class not of the permanently but of the precariously rich. And through a miscalculation I had laid myself open to the dangers that lie in wait for the man short of ready cash. The miscalculation was as to the extravagance of my wife's undertakings. She, against my express request, had contracted without consulting or telling me several enormous bills. It is idle to say she ought not have done this. I knew her well; I should have been on guard. I had begun my married life wrong, as the young man very much in love is apt to do; so, to hold her love and liking, I had to keep on giving her taste for spending money free rein. If I had not, she would have thought me small and mean, would have made life at home exceedingly uncomfortable for me, for I am not of those men who can take from a woman what they wish whether she wishes to give or not. So the whole fault was mine. When the storm broke, in the light of its first terrific flash that illuminated for me every part of my affairs, I discovered that I was not prepared as I had been imagining. The big bills of my wife were presented, for the merchants knew I was heavily interested in the stocks that were tobogganing. Those bills had to be paid, and paid at once, or it would run like wildfire uptown and down that I was in difficulties; and when a man is known to be in financial difficulties, how the birds and beasts of prey from eagles

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

and lions to buzzards and jackals do come flapping and loping!

There followed several anxious days and nights. On one of those nights I rose from beside my wife—we still slept together—and went into the adjoining room. I turned on an electric light and began for the thousandth time, I dare say, to look at the critical papers and to grope for the desperate “way out.” I was startled by my wife’s voice—sleepy, peevish:

“Do turn out that light and come to bed, Godfrey. You know how it disturbs me for you to get up in the night. And I’ve such a hard day before me to-morrow with the upholsterers and curtain people.”

I obediently turned off the light. As I was about to throw myself into bed and draw the covers over me, a broad beam from the moon flooded the face of a portrait on the opposite wall—the face of my daughter Margot. I sat on the edge of the bed and looked at that face—pure, sweet, with the same elevated expression her mother had in these days of refinement and climbing. Said I to Edna:

“Are you asleep, dear?”

“No,” she answered crossly. “I’m waiting for you to quiet down.”

“Then—let me talk to you a few minutes.”

“Oh, please!” she cried, flinging herself to the far edge of the bed. “You have no consideration for me—none at all.”

“Listen,” I said. “I’m face to face with ruin.”

She did not move or speak, but I could feel her intense attention.



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"If I let matters take their course I can save my reputation and my official position. But for many years we'll have to live quietly—about as we did in Brooklyn."

"I *can't* do that," cried she. "The fall would kill me. You know how proud I am. . . . Just as I had everything ready for us to get into society! Godfrey, how could you! And I thought you were clever at business."

I could not see her, nor she me, except in dimmest outline. I said: "But we'd have each other and Margot. And my salary isn't so small, as salaries go."

"Isn't there *any* way to avoid it?" She was sitting up in bed, her nervous fingers upon my arm. "You must *think*, Godfrey. You mustn't play Margot and me this horrible trick. You mustn't give up so easily. You must think—think—*think!*"

"I have," said I. "I've not slept for three days and nights. There's no way—no honest way."

"Then there *is* a way!" she cried.

"But not an honest one."

She laughed scornfully. "And you pretend to love me! When my life and Margot's happiness are at stake you talk like a Sunday-school boy."

"Yes," said I. "And I've been thinking more or less that way lately for the first time in years. It wasn't long after I started when I cut my business eye teeth. I found out that as the game lay I'd not get far if I stuck to the old maxims of the copy book and the Sunday school. Except by accident nobody ever got rich who followed them. To get rich you've got to make

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

a lot of people work for you and work cheap, and you've got to sell what they make as dear as you can. Success in business means taking advantage of the ignorance or the necessities of your fellow men, or both."

"Don't waste time talking that kind of nonsense," said she impatiently. "It doesn't mean anything to me—or to anybody, I guess. The thing for you to do is to put your mind on the real thing—how to save your family and yourself."

"That's what I'm talking about," said I. "I'm talking about saving myself and my family. As I told you, my troubles—the first business troubles I've ever had—have set me to thinking. I've not been doing right all these years. It's true, everybody does as I've been doing. It's true I've been more generous and more considerate than most men with opportunities and the sense to see them. But I've been doing wrong."

I paused, hoping for some sign of sympathy. None came. I went on:

"And I've been wondering these last few days if by doing it I haven't been ruining myself and my family—not financially, but in more important ways. Edna, what's the sense in this life we're leading? What will be the end of it all? Is there any decency or happiness in it? Haven't we been going backward instead of forward?"

All the time I was talking I could feel she was not listening. When I finished she said: "Godfrey, what is this way you can escape by?"

"I can sell out my partners in the deals that have gone bad."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Perhaps they're selling *you* out," she instantly suggested. "Why, of course they are doing that very thing!—while *you* are driveling about honesty like a backwoods hypocrite of a church deacon."

"No, they're not selling me out," said I.

"How do you know?" cried she.

"I caught them at that trick in a former deal and in the early stages of this one. And I fixed things so that, while they have to trust me, I don't trust them."

She laughed mockingly. "Godfrey, I think your mind must be going. You talking about sacrificing your fortune and your wife and your child for men who've tried to ruin you—men who are even now thinking out some scheme for doing it. . . . Suppose you saved yourself and let them go—what then? Wouldn't you be rich? And when you were secure again couldn't you pay them back what they lost if you were still foolish enough to think it necessary?"

It was not the first time she had astonished me with the depth of her practical insight—and her skill at logic—when she cared to use her mind. "I had thought of saving myself and paying back afterwards," said I. "But I'm not sure I'd save myself. It's simply my one chance."

"Then you've got to take that chance," said she.

"I didn't expect you to talk like this," said I. "The only reason I haven't spoken of my troubles before was that I feared you'd forbid me to do what I was being tempted to do."

And that was the truth about my feeling. I had always heard—and had firmly believed—that woman

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

was somehow the exemplar of ideal morality, that it was she who kept men from being worse than they were, that the evil being done by men pursuing success was done without the knowledge of their pure, idealist wives and mothers and daughters. I can't account for my stupidity in this respect. Had I not on every side the spectacle that gave the lie to the shallow pretense of feminine moral superiority? Was it not the women, with their insatiable appetite for luxury and splurge; was it not the women, with their incessant demands for money and ever more money; was it not the women, with their profound immorality of any and every class that earns nothing and simply spends; was it not the women, the *ladies*, who were edging on the men to get money, no matter how? For whom were the grand houses, the expensive hotels, the exorbitant flimsy clothing, the costly jewelry, the equipages, the opera boxes, the senseless, spendthrift squandering upon the degrading vanities of social position?

I laughed somewhat cynically. "No wonder you've always refused to learn anything about business," said I. "It's a habit among big business men to refuse to know anything as to the details of a large transaction that can be carried through only by dirty work. If we don't know, we can pretend that the dirty work isn't being done by or for us—isn't being done at all."

"Now you are getting coarse," said my wife. "Do you know what I think of you?" I could not see her expression, but the voice always betrays if there is insincerity, because we do not deal enough with the blind to learn to deceive perfectly with the voice. Her tones

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

were absolutely sincere as she answered her own question: "I think it is cowardly of you to come to me with your business troubles. If you were brave you'd simply have quietly done whatever was necessary to save your family. Yes, it is cowardly!"

"I didn't mean it as cowardice," said I, admiring but irritated by this characteristic adroitness. "In the stories and the plays that give such thrills, the husband, in the crisis and tempted to do wrong, appeals to his wife. And they are brought closer together, and she helps him to do right, and everything ends happily." Again I laughed good-humoredly. "It doesn't seem to be turning out that way, does it, dear? My heavenly picture of you and Margot and me living modestly and making up in love what we lack in luxury—it doesn't attract you?"

She said in her patient, superior tone: "I suppose you never will understand me or my ideals. What you've been doing in annoying me with your business, it's as if when I was giving a dinner I assembled my guests and compelled them to watch all the preparations for the dinner—the killing of the lambs and the fish and the birds, the cleaning, all those ugly and low things. Bringing business into the home and the social life, it's like bringing the kitchen into the drawing-room."

The obvious answer to this shallow but plausible and attractive cleverness of hers did not come to me then. If it had I'd not have spoken it. For of what use to argue with the human animal, female or male, about its dearest selfishnesses and vanities? Of what use to point

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

out to human self-complacence, greediness and hypocrisy that a "refined" and "cultured" existence of ease and luxury can be obtained only by the theft and murder of dishonest business—that for one man to be vastly rich thousands of men must somehow be robbed and oppressed, even though the rich man himself directly does no robbing and oppressing? If I have sucking pig for dinner, I kill sucking pig as surely as if my hand wielded the knife of the butcher. But the human race finds it convenient and comfortable not to think so. Therefore, let us not bother our heads about it.

At that period of my career I had not thought things out so thoroughly as I have since—in these days when events have compelled me to open my eyes and to see. In my hypocrisy, in my eagerness to save myself, I was not loth to take refuge behind the advice given by my wife partly in genuine ignorance of business, partly in pretended ignorance of it.

Said I: "I suppose you're right. I ought to think only of my family. Heaven knows, my rascal friends aren't thinking in my interest. If I don't do it, no one will. There's no disputing that—eh?"

No reply. She was asleep—or, rather, was pretending to be asleep. The matter had been settled, why discuss it further? Why expose herself longer than unavoidable to the danger of being unable to be, or to pretend to be, ignorant of business, of the foundation upon which her splendid, cultured structure of ambition proudly reared?

Often in her sleep her hand would seek mine, and when it was comfortably nestled she would give a little

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

sigh of content that thrilled me through and through. Her hand now stole into mine and the sigh of content came softly from her lips. "My love," I murmured, kissing her cheek before I lay down. How could I for a minute have considered any course that would have made her unhappy, that might have lessened, perhaps destroyed, her love for me?

## IV

It is hardly necessary to say that I threw overboard my partners and saved myself. Indeed, I emerged from the crisis—liberally bespattered with mud, it is true—but richer than when I entered it. Since I was doing the act that was the supreme proof of my possessing the courage and the skill for leadership in business—since I was definitely breaking with the old-fashioned morality—I felt it was the part of wisdom to do the thing so thoroughly, so profitably, that instead of being execrated I should be admired. There were attacks on me in the newspapers; there were painful interviews with my partners—not so painful to me as they would have been had I not been able to remind them of their own unsuccessful treacheries and to enforce the spoken reminder with the documentary proof. But on the whole I came off excellently well—as who does not that “gets away with the goods?”

In these days of increased intelligence and consequent lessened hypocrisy, the big business man is the object of only perfunctory hypocrisies from outraged morality. It has been discovered that the farmer watering his milk or the grocer using solder-“mended” scales is as bad as the man who “reorganizes” a railway or manipulates



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

a stock—is worse actually because the massed mischief of the million little business rascals is greater than the sensational misdeeds of the few great rascals. It has been discovered that human nature is good or bad only according to the opportunities and necessities, not according to abstract moral standards. And the cry is no longer, “Kill the scoundrel,” but, “That fellow had the sense to outwit us. We must learn from him how to sharpen our wits so that we won’t let ourselves be robbed.” A healthful sign this, that masses of men are ceasing from twaddle about vague ideals and are educating themselves in practical horse sense. It may be that some day the honest husbandman will learn to guard his granary not only against the robber with the sack in the dark of the morn, but also against the rats and mice who pilfer ten bushels to every one that is stolen. Of one thing I am certain—until men learn to take heed in the small, they will remain easy prey in the large.

Far from doing me harm, my bold stroke was of the greatest benefit—from the standpoint of material success, and that is the only point of view I am here considering. It did me as much good with the world as it has done me with you, gentle reader. For while you are exclaiming against my wickedness you are in your secret heart confessing that if I had chosen the ideally honest course, had retired to obscurity and poverty, you would have approved—and would have lost interest in me. Why, if I had chosen that ideal course, I doubt not I should have lost my railway position. My directors would have waxed enthusiastic over my “old-fash-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ioned honesty," and would have looked round for another and shrewder and stronger man to whom to intrust the management of their railway—which would not pay dividends were it run along the lines of old-fashioned honesty. The outburst of denunciation soon spent itself, like a summer storm beating the giant cliffs of a mountain. Of what use to rage futilely against my splendid immovable fortune? The attacks, the talk about my bold stroke, the exaggerations of the size of the fortune I had made, all served to attract attention to me, to make me a formidable and an interesting figure. I leaped from obscurity into fame and power—and I had the money to maintain the position I had won.

Long before, indeed as soon as we moved to Manhattan, my wife had joined fashionable and exclusive Holy Cross Church and had plunged straightway into its charity work. A highly important part of her Brooklyn education had been got in St. Mary's, in learning how to do charity work and how to make it count socially. Edna genuinely loved charity work. She loved to patronize, loved to receive those fawning blessings and handkissings which city poverty becomes adept at giving the rich it lives off of. The poor family understands perfectly that the rich visit and help not through mere empty sentimental nonsense of brotherhood, but to have their vanities tickled in exchange for the graciousness of their condescending presence and for the money they lay out. As the poor want the money and have no objection to paying for it

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

with that cheap and plentiful commodity, cringing—scantily screening mockery and contempt—rich and poor meet most comfortably in our cities. Not New York alone, but any center of population, for human nature is the same, city and country, San Francisco, Bangor—Pekin or Paris, for that matter.

There is a shallow fashion of describing this or that as peculiarly New York, usually snobbishness or domestic unhappiness or wealth worship, dishonest business men or worthless wives. It is time to have done with such nonsense. New York is in no way peculiar, nor is any other place, beyond trifling surface differences. New York is nothing but the epitome of the whole country, just as Chicago is. If you wish to understand America, study New York or Chicago, our two universal cities. There you find in one place and in admirable perspective a complete museum of specimens of what is scattered over three and a half million square miles. For, don't forget, New York is not the few blocks of fashionable district alone. It is four million people of all conditions, tastes, and activities. And the dominant force of struggle for money and fashion is no more dominant in New York than it is in the rest of America. New York is more truly representative of America than is Chicago, for in Chicago the Eastern and Southern elements are lacking and the Western element is strong out of proportion.

I was telling of my wife's blossoming as Lady Bountiful in search not of a heavenly crown, but of what human Lady Bountiful always seeks—social position. Charity covers a multitude of sins; the greatest of them

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

is hypocrisy. I have yet to see a charitable man or woman or child whose chief and only noteworthy object was not self-glorification. The people who believe in brotherhood do not go in for charity. They wish to abolish poverty, whereas charity revels in poverty and seeks to increase it, to change it from miserable poverty which might die into comfortable pauperism which can live on, and fester and breed on, and fawn on and give vanity ever more and more exquisite titillations. Holy Cross, my wife's new spiritual guide, was past master of the pauper-making and pauper-utilizing arts. Its rector and his staff of slimy sycophants had the small standing army of its worthy poor trained to perfection. When my wife went down among them, she returned home with face aglow and eyes heavenly. What a treat those wretches had given her! And in the first blush of her enthusiasm she dispensed lavishly, where the older members of the church exacted the full measure of titillation for every dollar invested and awarded extra sums only to some novelty in lickspittling or toadeating.

Were I not sure I should quite wear out the forbearance of gentle reader, I should linger to describe this marvelous charity plant for providing idle or social-position-hunting rich women with spiritual pleasures—I had almost said debaucheries, but that would be intruding my private and perhaps prejudiced opinion. I have no desire to irritate, much less shake the faith of, those who believe in Holy Cross and its “uplift” work. And I don't suppose Holy Cross does any great amount of harm. The poor who prostitute themselves to its purposes are weak things, beyond redemption.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

As for the rich who waste time and money there, would they not simply waste elsewhere were there no Holy Cross?

My wife was, at that time, a very ignorant woman, thinly covered with a veneer of what I now know was a rather low grade of culture. That veneer impressed me. It had impressed our Brooklyn friends of St. Mary's. But I fancy it must have looked cheap to expert eyes. Where her surpassing shrewdness showed itself was in that she herself recognized her own shortcomings. Rare and precious is the vanity that comforts and sustains without self-deception. She knew she wasn't the real thing, knew she had not yet got hold of the real thing. And when she began to move about, cautiously and quietly, in Holy Cross, she realized that at last she was in the presence of the real thing.

My big responsibilities, my associations in finance, had been giving me a superb training in worldly wisdom. I think I had almost as strong a natural aptitude for "catching on" to the better thing in speech and manner and in dress as had Edna. It is not self-flattery for me to say that up to the Holy Cross period I was further advanced than she. Certainly I ought to have been, for a man has a much better opportunity than a woman, and one of the essentials of equipment for great affairs is ability to observe accurately the little no less than the large. Looking back, I recall things which lead me to suspect that Edna saw my superiority in certain matters most important to her, and was irritated by it. However that may be, a few months in Holy Cross and she had grasped the essentials of the

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

social art as I, or any other masculine man, never could grasp it. And her veneer of "middle-class" culture disappeared under a thick and enduring coating of the best New York manner.

"What has become of *you*?" I said to her. "I haven't seen you in weeks."

"I don't understand," said she, ruffling as she always did when she suspected me of indulging in my coarse and detestable sense of humor.

"Why, you don't act like yourself at all," said I. "Even when we're alone you give the uncomfortable sense of dressed-up—not as if *you* were 'dressed-up,' but as if *I* were. I feel like a plowboy before a princess."

She was delighted!

"You," I went on, "are now exactly like the rest of those women in Holy Cross. I suppose it's all right to look and talk and act that way before people. At least, I've no objection if it pleases you. But for heaven's sake, Edna, don't spoil our privacy with it. The queen doesn't wear her coronation robes all the time."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," said she.

"Don't you?" cried I, laughing. "What a charming fraud you are!" And I seized her in my arms and kissed her. And she seemed to yield and to return my caresses. But I was uncomfortable. She would not drop that new manner. The incident seems trifling enough; perhaps it was trifling. But it stands out in my memory. It marks the change in our relationship. I recall it all distinctly—how she looked, how young and charming and cold, what she was wearing, the delicate

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

simple dress that ought to have made her most alluring to me, yet made me feel as if she were indeed alluring, but not for *me*. A subtle difference there, but abysmal; the difference between the woman who tries to make herself attractive for the sake of her husband and the woman who makes toilets in the conscious or half-conscious longing successfully to prostitute herself to the eyes of the public. I recall every detail of that incident; yet I have only the vaguest recollection of our beginning to occupy separate bedrooms. By that time the feeling of alienation must have grown so strong that I took the radical change in our habits as the matter of course.

Many are the women, in all parts of the earth, who have sought to climb into the world of fashion by the broad and apparently easy stairway of charity. But most of them have failed because they were unaware of the secret of that stairway, an unsuspected secret which I shall proceed to point out. It seems, as I have said, a particularly easy stairway—broad, roomy, with invalid steps. It is, in fact, a moving stairway so cunningly contrived that she—it is usually she—who ascends keeps in the same place. She goes up, but at exactly her ascending rate the stairway goes down. She sees other women making apparently no more effort than she ascending rapidly, and presently entering the earthly heaven at the top. Yet there she stands, marking time, moving not one inch upward, and there she will stand until she wearies, relaxes her efforts, and finds herself rapidly descending. But how do the women who ascend accomplish it? I do not know. You must ask them. I only know the cause of the failure

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

of the women who do not ascend. If I knew why the others succeeded I should not tell it. I would not deprive fashionable women of the joy of occupying a difficult height from which they can indulge themselves in the happiness of sneering and spitting down at their lowlier sisters. And I have no sympathy with the aspirations or the humiliations of those lowlier sisters.

My energetic and aspiring wife presently found herself on this stairway, with no hint as to its secret, much less as to the way of overcoming its peculiarity. She toiled daily in Holy Cross. She subscribed to everything, she helped in everything. She was the proud recipient of the rector's loud praises as his "most devoted, least worldly, most spiritual helper." But—not an invitation of the kind she wanted. Everyone was "just lovely" to her. Whenever any charitable or spiritual matter was to be discussed, no matter how grand and exclusive the house in which the discussion was to be held, there was my wife in a place of honor, eagerly consulted—and urged to subscribe. But nothing unworldly. They understood how spiritual she was, did those sweet, good people. They knew Saint Edna wished no social frivolities—no dinners or theater parties, no bridge or dancing.

She was a wise lady. She hid her burning impatience. She smiled and purred when she yearned to scowl and scratch. She waited, and prayed for some lucky accident that would swing her across the invisible, apparently nonexistent but actually impassable dead line. She had expected snubs and cold shoulders.



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Never a snub, never a cold shoulder. Always smiles and gracious handshakings and amiable familiarities, but those always of the kind that serve to accentuate caste distinction instead of removing it. For the first time in her life, I think, she was completely stumped. She could combat obstacles. She might even have found a way to fight fog. But how ridiculous to make struggles and thrust out fists when there is nothing but empty, sunny air!

She held church lunches and dinners at our house—of course, had me on duty at the dinners. All in vain. The distinction between the spiritual and the temporal remained in force. The grand people came, acted as if they were delighted, complimented her on her house, on her hospitality, went away, to invite her to similar dreary functions at their houses. And my, how it did cost her! No wonder Holy Cross made a pet of her and elected me to the board of vestrymen.

Once in a while she would find something in her net, so slyly cast, so softly drawn. She would have a wild spasm of joy; then the something would turn out to be another climber like herself. Those climbers avoided each other as devils dodge the font of holy water. The climber she would have caught would be one who, ignorant of the intricacies of New York society, was under the impression that the Mrs. Godfrey Loring so conspicuous in Holy Cross must be a social personage. They would examine each other—at a series of joyous entertainments each would provide for the other, would discover their mutual mistake—and— You know the contemptuous toss with which the fisherman rids him-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

self of a bloater; you know the hysterical leap of the released bloater back into the water.

But how it was funny! My wife did not take me into her confidence as to her social struggles. She maintained with me the same sweet, elegant exterior of spiritual placidity with which she faced the rest of the world. Nevertheless, in a dim sort of way I had some notion of what she was about—though, as I was presently to discover, I was wholly mistaken in my idea of her progress.

“What has happened to Mrs. Lestrangle?” I said to her one evening at dinner. “Is she ill?”

She cast a quick, nervous glance in the direction of the butler. I, looking at him by way of a mirror, thought I saw upon his aristocratic countenance a faint trace of that insolent secret glee which fills servants when their betters are humiliated before them. “Mrs. Lestrangle?” she said carelessly. “Oh, I see her now and then.”

“But you’ve been inseparable until lately,” said I. “A quarrel, I suppose?”

“Not at all,” said my wife tartly.

And she shifted abruptly to another subject. When I went to the little study adjoining my sitting room to smoke she came with me. There she said:

“Please don’t mention Mrs. Lestrangle before the servants again.”

“Why, what’s up?” said I. “Did she turn out to be a crook?”

“Heavens, no! How coarse you are, Godfrey. Simply that I was terribly mistaken in her.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"She looked like a confidence woman or a madam," said I. "Didn't you tell me she was a howling swell?"

"I thought she was," said my wife, and I knew something important was coming; only that theory would account for her admitting she had made a mistake. "And in a way she was. But they caught her several years ago taking money to get some dreadful low Western people into society. Since then she's asked—she herself—because she's well connected and amusing. But she can't help anyone else."

"Oh, I see," said I. "And you don't feel strong enough socially as yet to be able to afford the luxury of her friendship."

"Strong enough!" said Edna with intense bitterness. "I have no position at all—none whatever."

I was surprised, for until that moment I had been assuming she was on or near the top of the wave, moving swiftly toward triumphant success. "You want too much," said I. "You've really got all there is to get. At that last reception of yours you had all the heavy swells. My valet told me so."

"Reception to raise funds for the orphanage," said Edna with a vicious sneer—the unloveliest expression I had ever seen on her lovely face—and I had seen not a few unlovely expressions there in our many married years, some of them extremely trying years. "I tell you I am nobody socially. They take my money for their rotten old charities. They use me for their tiresome church work—and they do nothing for me—nothing! How I *hate* them!"

I sat smoking my cigar and watching her face. It

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

was a wonderfully young face. Not that she was so old; on the contrary, she was still young in years. I call her face wonderfully young because it had that look of inexhaustible, eternal youth which is rare even in the faces of boys and girls. But that evening I was not thinking so much of her youth and her beauty as of a certain expression of hardness, of evil passions rampant—envy and hatred and jealousy, savage disappointment over defeats in sordid battles.

“Edna,” said I, hesitatingly, “why don’t you drop all that? Can’t you see there’s nothing in it? You’re tempting the worst things in your nature to grow and destroy all that’s good and sweet—all that makes you—and me—happy. People aren’t necessary to us. And if you must have friends, surely *all* the attractive people in New York aren’t in that little fashionable set. Judging from what I’ve seen of them, they’re a lot of bores.”

“They look bored here,” retorted she. “And no wonder! They come as a Christian duty.”

I laughed. “Now, honestly, are those fashionable people the best educated, the best in any way—any real way? I’ve talked with the men, and the younger ones—the ones that go in for society—are unspeakable rotters. I wouldn’t have them about.”

Edna’s eyes flashed, and her form quivered in a gust of hysterical fury—the breaking of long-pent passion, of anger and despair, taking me as an excuse for vent. “Oh, it’s terrible to be married to a man who *always* misunderstands!—one who can’t sympathize!” cried she. It was a remark she often made, but never before had she put so much energy, so much bitterness into it.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"What do I misunderstand?" I asked, more hurt than I cared to show. "Where don't I sympathize?"

"Let's not talk about it!" exclaimed she. "If I weren't a remarkable woman I'd have given up long ago—I'd give up now."

Before you smile at her egotism, gentle reader, please remember that husband and wife were talking alone; also that with a few pitiful exceptions all human beings think surpassingly well of themselves, and do not hesitate to express that good opinion privately. I guess there's more lying done about lack of egotism and of vanity generally than about all other matters put together.

Said I: "You are indeed a wonder, dear. In this country one sees many astonishing transformations. But I doubt if there have been many equal to the transformation of the girl I married into the girl who's sitting before me."

"And what good has it done me?" demanded she. "How I've worked away at myself—inside and out—and all for nothing!"

"You've still got *me*," said I jovially, yet in earnest too. "Lots of women lose their husbands. I've never had a single impulse to wander."

In the candor of that intimacy she gave me a most unflattering look—a look a woman does well not to cast at a man unless she is more absolutely sure of him than anyone can be of anything in this uncertain world. I laughed as if I thought she meant that look as a jest; I put the look away in my memory with a mark on it that meant "to be taken out and examined at leisure."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

But she was absorbed in her chagrin over her social failure; she probably hardly realized I was there.

"Well, what's the next move?" inquired I presently.

"You've got to help," replied she—and I knew this was what she had been revolving in her mind all evening.

"Anything that doesn't take me away from business, or keep me up too late to fit myself for the next day."

"Business—always business," said she, in deepest disgust. "Do you *never* think of anything else?"

"My business and my family—that's my life," said I.

"Not your family," replied she. "You care nothing about them."

"Edna," I said sharply, "that is unjust and untrue."

"Oh, you give them money, if that's what you mean," said she disdainfully.

"And I give them love," said I. "The trouble is I give so freely that you don't value it."

"Oh, you are a good husband," said she carelessly. "But I want you to take an interest."

"In your social climbing?"

"How insulting you are!" she cried, with flashing eyes. "I am trying to claim the position we are entitled to, and you speak of me as if I were one of those vulgar pushers."

"I beg your pardon," said I humbly. "I was merely joking."

"I've often told you that your idea of humor was revolting."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I felt distressed for her in her chagrin and despair. I was ready to bear almost anything she might see fit to inflict. "What do you want me to do?" I asked. "Whatever it is, I'll do it. Do you need more money?"

"I need help—real help," said she.

"Money's god over the realm of fashion, the same as it is over that of—of religion—of politics—or anything you please. And luckily I've got that little god in my employ, my dear."

"If you are so powerful," said she, "put me into fashionable society—make these people receive me and come to my house."

"But they do," I reminded her.

"I mean *socially*," cried she. "*Can't* I make you understand? Why are business men so dumb at anything else? Compel these people to take me as one of them."

"Now, Edna, my dear," protested I, "be reasonable. How can I do that?"

"Easily, if you've got real power," rejoined she. "It's been done often, I've found out lately. At least half the leaders in society got in originally by compelling it. But you, going round among men intimately—you must know it—must have known all along. If you'd been the right sort of man I'd not have to humiliate myself by asking you—by saying these dreadful things." Her eyes were flashing and her bosom was heaving. "Women have hated men for less. But I must bear my cross. You insist on degrading me. Very well. I'll let myself be degraded. I'll say the things a decent man would not ask a woman to say——"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Edna, darling," I pleaded. "Honestly, I don't understand. You'll have to tell me. And it's not degrading. We have no secrets from each other. We who love each other can say anything to each other—anything. What do you wish me to do?"

"Use your power over the men. Frighten them into ordering their wives to invite us and to accept our invitations. You do business with a lot of the men, don't you?"

"Yes," said I.

"You can benefit or injure them, as you please, can't you?—can take money away from them—can put them in the way of making it?"

"Yes," said I; "to a certain extent."

"And how do you use this power?"

"In building up great enterprises. I am founding a city just now, for instance, where there was nothing but a swamp beside a lake, and——"

"In making more and more money for yourself," she cut in, "you think only of yourself."

"And you—what do *you* think of?" said I.

"Not of myself," cried she indignantly. "Never of myself. Of Margot. Of you. Of the family. I am working to build *us* up—to make *us* somebody and not mere low money grubbers."

I did not see it from her point of view. But I was not inclined to aggravate her excitement and anger.

"Why shouldn't you use your powers for some unselfish purpose?" she went on. "Why not try to have higher ambition?"

I observed her narrowly. She was sincere.



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I want you to help me—for Margot's sake, for your own sake," she went on in a kind of exaltation. "Margot is coming on. She'll be out in less than three years. We've got to make a position for her."

"I thought, up there at Miss Ryper's she was——"

"That shows how little interest you take!" cried Edna. "Don't you know what is happening? Why, already the fashionable girls at her school are beginning to shy off from her——"

"Don't be absurd!" laughed I. "That simply could not be. She's lovely, sweet, attractive in every way. Any girls anywhere would be proud to have her as a friend."

"How *can* you be so ignorant of the world!" cried Edna in a frenzy of exasperation. "Oh, you'll drive me mad with your stupidity! Can't you realize how *low* fashionable people are. The girls who were her friends so long as they were all mere children are now taking a positive delight in snubbing her, because she's so pretty and will be an heiress. It gives them a sense of power to treat her as an inferior, to make her suffer."

I flung away the cigar and sat up in the chair. "How long has this been going on?" I demanded.

"Nearly a year," replied my wife. "It began as soon as she lost her childishness and developed toward a woman. I'm glad I've roused you at last. So long as she was a mere baby they liked her—invited her to their children's parties—came to hers. But now they're dropping her. Oh, it's maddening! They are so sweet and smooth, the vile little daughters of vile mothers!"

"Incredible!" said I. "Surely not those sweet,

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

well-mannered girls I've seen here at her parties? *They* couldn't do that sort of thing. Why, what do those babies know about social position and such nonsense?"

"What do they know? What *don't* they know?" cried Edna, trembling with rage at her humiliation and at my incredulity. "You *are* an innocent! There ought to be a new proverb—innocent as a married man. Why, nowadays the children begin their social training in the cradle. They soon learn to know a nurse or a butler from a lady or a gentleman before they learn to walk. They hear the servants talk. They hear their parents talk. Except innocent you everyone nowadays thinks and talks about these things."

"But Margot—our Margot—she doesn't know!" I said with conviction.

Edna laughed harshly. "Know? What kind of mother do you think I am? Of course she knows. Haven't I been teaching her ever since she began to talk? Why do you suppose I've always called her the little duchess?"

"She suggests a superior little person," said I, groping vaguely.

"She suggests a superior person because I gave her that name and brought her up to look and act and feel the part. She expects to be a real duchess some day—" Edna reared proudly, and her voice rang out confidently as she added—"and she shall be!"

I stared at her. It seemed to me she must be out of her mind. Oh, I was indeed innocent, gentle reader.

"I've always treated her as a duchess, and have made the servants do it, and have trained her to treat

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

them as if she were a duchess." A proud smile came into her face, transforming it suddenly back to its loveliness. "The first time I ever read about a duchess—read, knowing what I was reading about—I decided that I would have a daughter and that she should be a duchess."

At any previous time such a sally would have made me laugh. But not then, for I saw that she meant it profoundly, and for the first time I was realizing what had been going on in my family, all unsuspected by me.

"But first," proceeded Edna, "she shall have the highest social position in New York. And you must help if I am to succeed." The fury burst into her face again. "Those little wretches, snubbing her!—dropping her! I'll make them pay for it."

"Do you mean to tell me that Margot realizes all this?" said I.

"Poor child, she's wretched about it. Only yesterday she said to me: 'Mamma, is it true that you and papa are very common, and that we haven't anything but a lot of stolen money? One of the girls got mad at me because I was so good-looking and so proud, and taunted me with it.'"

"Incredible!" said I, dazed.

"She's horribly unhappy," Edna went on. "And it cuts her to the heart to be losing all her dearest friends. I did my duty and taught her which girls to cultivate, and she was intimate only with the right sort of New York girls."

"I expect she has been indiscreet," said I. "They've found out why she made friends with them and——"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You will drive me crazy!" cried Edna. "*Can't* you understand? All the mothers and the governesses—all the grown people in respectable families teach the children. Those mothers who don't teach it directly see that it's taught by the governesses, or else select the proper friends for their little girls and see that they drop any who aren't proper."

I dropped back in my chair. I was stunned. It seemed to me I had never heard anything quite so infamous in my life. And as I reflected on what she had said I wondered that I had not realized it before. I recalled a hundred significant facts that had come out in talks I had had with men, women, and children in this fashionable world from which we were excluded, yet with which we were in constant and close communication.

"The question is, what are *you* going to do," proceeded Edna.

I shook my head, probably looking as dazed as I felt.

"What does that headshake mean?" demanded she.

"*You*—taught *Margot* to be a—a—like those other girls?" said I.

"Oh, you fool!" cried Edna. And in excuse for her, please remember I had ever been a dotingly bored slave of hers—as uxorious a husband as you ever saw—and therefore inevitably despised, for women have so little intelligence that they despise a man who loves them and lets them rule. "You fool!" she repeated. "Yes, I brought her up like a lady—taught her to cultivate nice things and nice people. What should I

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

teach her? To associate with common people? To drop back toward where we came from—where *you* belong?”

“Yes, I guess I do,” said I.

Up to that time I had interested myself in only one aspect of human nature—the aspect that concerned me as a business man. But from that time I began to study the human animal in all his—and her—aspects. And it was not long before I learned what that animal is forced to become when exposed to the powerful thrusts and temptings of wealth and social position. In our alternations of pride and humility we habitually take undue credit or give undue blame to ourselves for what is wholly the result of circumstance. The truth is, we are like flocks of birds in a high wind. Some of us fly more steadily than others, some are quite beaten down, others seem almost self-directing; but all, great and small, weak and strong, are controlled by the wind, and those who make the best showing are those who adapt themselves most skillfully to the will of the wind.

At the time when Edna and I were talking I had not become a philosopher. I was in the primitive stages of development in which most men and nearly all women remain their whole lives through—the stage in which you live, gentle reader, with your shallow mistaken notions of what is and your shallower mistaken notions of what ought to be. So, as Edna uncovered herself to me, I shrank in horror. It was fortunate—for her, at least—that I had always trained myself never to make hasty speeches. My expertness in that habit has probably been the principal cause of my business success, of my ability to outwit even abler men than myself.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I did not yield to the impulse to burst out against her. I compressed my lips and silently watched as she lifted the veil over our family life and revealed to me the truth about it.

"What are you going to do?" she asked impatiently, yet with a certain uneasiness born no doubt of a something in my manner that made her vaguely afraid, for while she knew I was her slave and despised me, as I was to learn, for being so weak before a mere woman, she also knew that, outside of her domain, I was not her slave nor anybody's, but planned and executed at the pleasure of my own will.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," said I slowly. "I must think. All this is new to me."

"If you haven't any pride in yourself, or in me," said she, "still you surely must have pride for Margot."

"I think so," said I.

"If you could know how they have made the poor child suffer!"

I made no reply, nor did I encourage her to talk further. In fact, when she began again I stopped her with: "I've heard enough, my dear. And I've some important business to attend to."

She, preparing to leave me alone with my papers, came and put her arms round my neck and pressed her cheek against mine. I think she was uneasy about the posture of the affair in my mind—feared stupid commercial I could not appreciate these vital things of life. I suspect my tranquil reception of her caresses did not tend to allay her uneasiness. Never before had she failed to interest me in her physical self; and the only

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

reason she then failed was that in the general upsetting of all my ideas of what my family life was there had been tossed up to the surface an undefined suspicion of her sincerity as a wife. I was not altogether blind as to the relations of men and women, as to the fact that women often coolly played upon the passions of men for their own purposes of money getting in its various forms. My wife was right in her sneer at the innocence of married men. But there are exceptions, and a woman with a husband intelligent in every way except in seeing through women would do well to take care how she tempts his intelligence to shake off its indifference in that respect.

The next morning I was breakfasting alone as usual. No, gentle reader, I am not girding at my poor wife as you hastily accuse. I am sure I do not deceive myself when I say I never was of those men who fuss about trifles. Thank heaven, as soon as we had a servant my wife kept away from breakfast. It was one of the things I loved her for. If I had been married to a woman who appeared at breakfast looking lovely and smiling sweetly, I should have become a bad-tempered tyrant. I want no sentimentalities in the early morning hours. I wake up uncomfortable and sour, and I quarrel with myself and look about for trouble until I have had something to eat and coffee. Further in the same direction, I took particular pleasure in my wife's small personal slovenlinesses, in her curl papers, in her occasional overlaying of her face with cold cream and the like, in her careless negligee worn in her own rooms. There is, I guess, no nature so prodigal that it has not some small

economies. Edna had, probably still has, a fondness for wearing out thoroughly, in secluded privacy, house dresses, underclothes, and night gowns.

It took nothing from my delight in her beauty that she was not invariably beautiful. I've rarely seen her lovely early in the morning. Who is? I should have taken habitual early-morning loveliness as a personal insult. I've seen her homely all day long, and for several days at a time. She was as attractive to me than as at her most beautiful. I detest monotony. Thank heaven, she was never monotonous to look at; one rather expects *mental* monotony in women unless one is a fool. I didn't mind her times of homeliness, because she could be so far, far the opposite of homely. I did not mind her way of getting herself up in odds and ends, mussily, but, mind you, never after the Passaic days unclean—never! I did not mind her dishevelments because, when she set out to dress, she did it so bang up well. She was born with a talent for dress; she rapidly developed it into an art. You know what I mean. You've seen the girl with hardly five dollars' worth of clothing on her, including the hat, yet making the woman from the best dressmaker in Paris look a frump.

I never had to join the innumerable and pitiful army of men who give the woman their money to squander upon bad fits and bad taste, and are bowed down with shame when they have to issue forth with her. I can honestly say, and Edna will bear me out, that I gave her money freely. No doubt the reason in part was I found it so easy to make money that I was indifferent to extravagance. But the chief reason, I believe, was



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Edna's skill at dress. The woman who is physically alluring to her husband, and who knows how to dress, rarely has difficulty in getting money from him, though he be a miser. But, gentle lady reader, can you in your heart blame a man for grudging his earnings to a woman who isn't fit to dress and who doesn't know how, either?

As I had begun to tell when I interrupted myself, I was breakfasting alone the morning after that memorable talk with Edna, and Margot came down to glance in for a smile at me on her way to school.

In theory Margot was still classed as a child, and would be so classed for two years longer. In fact she was, and had been for two years and more, a full-fledged young lady. That is the way American children of the rank for which my wife was training Margot are being brought up nowadays. She had her own apartment, dressing room and bath, sitting room, reception room—as many rooms as my wife and I had altogether when we began married life, and about four times the room. As for luxury, a comparison would be ridiculous. Also Margot had her own staff of servants—companion, maid, maid's assistant—and her own automobile with chauffeur, used by no one else. It would be hard to find more helpless creatures than these young aspirants to aristocracy. And they prided themselves upon their ignorance of the realities, and their mothers, often with hypocritical pretense of distress, boasted it. At that time I thought it amusing. The serious side of it was entirely out of my range. We American men of the comfortable and luxurious classes are addicted to the habit of re-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

garding our wives and children as toys, as mere sources of amusement not to be taken seriously. It isn't strange that the children should not mind this, but what a commentary upon the real mentality of the women that they tolerate and encourage it! Our women are always, with a fine show of earnestness, demanding that they be taken seriously. But woe unto the man who believes them in earnest and tries to treat them as his equals instead of as dainty toys, odalisques. How he will be denounced, hated, and, if proper alimony can be got, divorced!

Margot's parties differed in no respect from grown-up parties, except that there were restrictions in the matter of hours and also as to the serving of drinks. For, I believe my wife did not follow the extreme of fashionable custom, but forbade wines and punch at these parties. In this matter, as in the matter of using slang and in many others, she held that only people of long-established social position, people with what is called tradition, could safely make excursions beyond the bounds of conventionality; that it was safest, wisest for people like herself to stay well within the bounds, to be prim even, and so to avoid any possible criticism as vulgar. A very shrewd woman was Edna. If her intelligence had been equal to her shrewdness and energy, and if she had possessed a gleam of the sense of humor! However——

In no essential respect did Margot's routine of life differ from that of her mother—and her mother's routine of inane and worthless time-killing was modeled exactly upon that of all the fashionable women and apers

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of fashionable women. Edna did a vast amount of studying, with and without teachers. It was all shallow and showy. Margot's studies were also beneath contempt. I amused myself from time to time by inquiring—with pretense of gravity—into what they were teaching her at the Ryper school for the turning out of fashionable womanhood. Such a mess of trash! She was learning much about social usages, from how to sit in a carriage—a rare art that, I assure you, gentle reader—to how to receive guests at a large dinner. She was studying some of the vulgarities—science, history, literature, and the like—but in no vulgar way. She would get only the thinnest smatter of talkable stuff about them—nothing “unsettling,” nothing that might possibly rouse the mind to think or distract the attention from the “high” things of life. She was dabbling in music, in drawing, in several similar costly fripperies. And the sum total of expense!—well, no wonder Miss Ryper was fast becoming as rich as some of the asteroids in the plutocracy she adored.

I regarded Margot's education as a species of joke. It never occurred to me that our pretty baby had the right to be educated to become a wife and a mother. And why should it have occurred to me? Where is that being done? Who is thinking of it? In all the oceans of twaddle about the elevation of woman where is there a drop of good sense about *real* education? You say I was criminally negligent as to my daughter's education. But how about your own? The truth is, we all still look upon education as a frill, an ornament. We never think of it, whether for our sons

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

or for our daughters, as nothing more or less than teaching a human being how to live. It is high time to end this idiotic ignorant exaltation of tomfoolery into culture!

Poor Margot! How the little girls in plain clothes—and machine-made underwear—must have envied her as she swept along in her limousine, dressed with that enormously costly simplicity which only the rich can afford. No wonder many of the other girls at the Ryper school hated her. For, her mother was in one respect unlike most of the fashionable mothers who are too busy doing things not worth doing to attend to their children. Her mother gave her loving care, spent many hours—of anxious thought, no doubt—in planning to make her the most luxurious, the most helpless, the most envied girl in the school. We hear unendingly about the good that love does in the world. Not too much—no, indeed! But at the same time might it not be well if we also heard about the harm love can do—and does? How many sons and daughters have been ruined by loving parents! How many husbands have been wrecked by the flatteries and the assiduities of loving wives! How many wives have been lured to decay and destruction by the over-indulgent love of their husbands! What we need in this world is not more sentiment, but more intelligence. Sentiment is a force that rushes far and crazily in *both* directions, gentle reader, unless it has well-balanced intelligence to guide it.

Margot, smiling in the doorway of the breakfast room, put me at once into a less somber humor. She was tall and slim—an inch taller than her mother and

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

with the same supple, well-proportioned figure. She had her mother's small, tip-tilted face and luminous eyes, but they were of an intense dark gray that gave her an expression of poetic thoughtfulness and mystery. Whiter or more perfectly formed teeth I have never seen. In former days children's teeth were neglected. But my wife, with her peculiar reach for all matters having to do with appearances, had learned the modern methods of caring for the body when Margot was still in the period when the body is almost as formable as sculptor's clay. Thus Margot's teeth had been looked after and made perfect and kept so. Her hair hung loose upon her shoulders like a wonderful changeable veil of golden brown. Often at first glance you are dazzled by these carefully fed and carefully groomed children of the rich, only to note at the second glance that the best showing has been made of precious little in the way of natural charm. But this was not true of Margot. The longer you looked, and the more attentively, the finer she seemed to be—like a rare perfect specimen from a connoisseur's greenhouses. There's no doubt about it, Edna did know the physical side of life. She would have got notable results even had we been poor. As it was, with all the money she cared to spend, she performed what looked like miracles.

"Come and kiss me, Margot," said I.

She obeyed, with a charming air of restrained eagerness that is regarded as ladylike. "My car is waiting," said she. "I'm late."

"Is that Therese"—her maid—"out in the hall waiting to go with you?"

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"Yes. Miss Parnell"—her companion—"has a headache, poor creature!"

Margot had caught to perfection the refined, elegant, fashionable tone of speaking of the servile classes. Though I was in a critical mood that morning, I was not critical of my beloved little Margot, and her airs entertained me as much as ever. Said I:

"Sit down, little duchess"—the familiar name slipped out unconsciously—"and talk to me a few minutes."

"But I'm shockingly late, papa," pleaded she.

"No matter. I'll telephone Miss Ryper, if you wish." To the butler, who was serving me: "Sackville, go tell Therese that I'm detaining Miss Margot. And close the door behind you."

Sackville retired. Margot seated herself with alacrity. She did not like her useless school any better than other children like more or less useful schools. "Are you taking me to the theater Saturday afternoon, as you promised?" said she. "And do get a box and let me ask two of the girls."

"Certainly," said I. "If I can't go, Miss Parnell will chaperon you."

"No, I want you, papa. It's so nice to have a man."

"How are you getting on at school? Not with the studies"—I laughed at the absurdity of calling her fiddle-faddle studies—"but with the girls?"

Her face clouded. "Has mamma told you?"

"Told me what?"

She hesitated.

"Go on, dear," said I. "What's the trouble?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Oh, it's always the same thing," she sighed, with a grown-up air that was both humorous and pathetic. "Some of the girls are down on me—about—about social position. You see, we don't go *socially* with their families."

"Why should we?" said I. "We don't know them, nor they us. Naturally, they don't care anything about us, nor we about them."

She hung her head. "But I want to go with them," said she doggedly.

"Why?" said I.

"Because—because—it's the proper thing to do. If you don't go with them everybody looks down on you." She lifted her head, and her flashing eyes reminded me of her mother. "It makes me just *wild* to be looked down on."

"I should say so," said I. "Those little girls at Miss Ryper's must be an ill-bred lot. We must take you away from there and put you in a school with nice girls."

"Oh, no, father!" she cried in a panic. "Those girls are the *niciest*—the only nice girls in any school in New York. All the other schools look up to ours. I'd cry my eyes out in any other school."

"Why?" said I.

"I'd feel—*low*." Her eyes had filled and her cheeks were flushed. "I'd be out of place except among the richest and most aristocratic girls."

"But you don't like them," said I gently. I began to feel a sensation of sickness at the heart.

"I *hate* them!" cried she with passionate energy.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"But I want to stay on there and *make* them be friendly with me. I've got too much pride, papa, to run away."

"Pride," said I, and my tone must have been sad. "That isn't pride, dear. You ought to choose your friends by liking. You ought to feel above girls with such cheap ideas."

"But I'm not above them," protested she. "And I couldn't like any girl I'd be ashamed to be seen with, unless she were a sort of servant. Oh, papa, you don't appreciate how proud I am."

"Proud of what, dear? Of your parents? Of yourself?"

She hung her head.

"Of what, dear?" I urged.

"It hurts me not to be treated as—as the inside clique of girls in our secret society treat each other." She was almost crying. "They don't even call me by my first name any more. They speak to me as Miss Loring—and *so* politely—exactly as I speak to Miss Parnell or one of the teachers or a servant. Oh, I'm so proud! I'd love to be like Gracie Fortescue. She speaks even to Miss Ryper as I would to Miss Parnell."

My digestion wasn't any too good, even in those days. My whole breakfast suddenly went wrong—turned to poison inside me, I suppose. A hot wave of rage against I knew not whom or what rolled up into my brain. I pushed away my plate abruptly. "Run along, child," I said in a hoarse voice I did not recognize as my own.

She threw her arms round my neck with a gesture and an expression that made me realize how close a copy



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

of her mother she was. "You wouldn't take me away from my school, would you, papa dear?" she pleaded.

"All I want is to make you happy," said I, patting and stroking that thick and lovely veil of flowing hair.

She assumed that I meant she was to stay on with the viperous Ryper brood, and went away almost happy. She had awakened to the fact that there were fates even worse than being snubbed and addressed like a teacher or a companion or a servant or some other lower animal—yes, far worse fates. For instance, not being able to feel that she was, on whatever degrading terms, at least associated with the adored fashionables.

That evening when my wife again accompanied me to my study, after dinner, I said to her:

"I've been turning over our talk last night. I haven't been able to reach a conclusion as yet, except on one point. I can't help you socially in the way you suggested."

I glanced at her as I said this. She was looking at me. Her pale, intense expression fascinated me.

"I don't think you have thought about it fully," said she slowly.

"Yes," said I, with my utmost deliberateness; "and my decision is final."

She rose, stood beside her chair, rubbing her hand softly along the top of the back. "Very well," said she quietly. And she left me alone.

## V

IN refusing Edna her heart's desire thus promptly and tersely I had an object. I assumed she would protest and argue; in the discussion that would follow some light might come to me, utterly befogged as to what course to take about my family affairs. I knew something should be done—something quick and drastic. But what? It was no new experience to me to be faced with complex and well-nigh impossible situations. My business life had been a succession of such experiences. And while I had learned much as to handling them, I had also learned how dangerous it is to rush in recklessly and to begin action before one has discovered what to do—and what *not* to do. The world is full of Hasty Hals and Hatties who pride themselves on their emergency minds, on knowing just what to do in any situation the instant it arises; and fine spectacles they are, lying buried and broken amid the ruins they have aggravated if not created.

How recover my wife? How rescue my daughter? I could think of no plan—of no beginning toward a plan. And when Edna, by receiving my refusal in cold silence, defeated my hope of a possibly illuminating discussion, I did not know which way to turn.

Why had I refused to help her in the way she sug-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

gested? Not on moral grounds, gentle reader. There I should have been as free from scruple as you yourself would have been, as you perhaps have been in your social climbing or maneuvering in your native town, wherever it is. Nor yet through fear of failure. I did not know the social game, but I did know something of human nature. And I had found out that the triumphant class, far from being the gentlest and most civilized, as its dominant position in civilization would indicate, was in fact the most barbarous, was saturated with the raw savage spirit of the right of might. I am speaking of actualities, not of pretenses—of deeds, not of words. To find a class approaching it in frank savagery of will and action you would have to descend through the social strata until you came to the class that wields the blackjack and picks pockets and dynamites safes. The triumphant class became triumphant not by refinement and courtesy and consideration, but by defiance of those fundamentals of civilization—by successful defiance of them. It remained the triumphant class by keeping that primal savagery of nature. As soon as any member of it began to grow tame—gentle, considerate, except where consideration for others would increase his own wealth and power, became really a disciple of the sweet gospel he professed and urged upon others—just so soon did he begin to lose his wealth into the strong unscrupulous hands ever reaching for it—and with waning wealth naturally power and prestige waned.

No, I did not refuse because I thought the triumphant class would contemptuously repel any attempt to

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

carry its social doors by assault. I saw plainly enough that I could compel enough of these society leaders to receive my wife and daughters to insure their position. You have seen swine gathered about a trough, comfortably swilling; you have seen a huge porker come running with angry squeal to join the banquet. You have observed how rudely, how fiercely he is resented and fought off by the others. This, until he by biting and thrusting has made a place for himself; then the fact that he is an intruder and the method of his getting a place are forgotten, and the swilling goes peacefully forward. So it is, gentle reader, though it horrifies your hypocrisy to be told it, so do human beings conduct themselves round a financial or political or social swill trough. I should have had small difficulty in biting and kicking a satisfactory place for Edna and Margot at the social swill trough; I should have had no difficulty at all in keeping it for them. But——

You will be incredulous, gentle reader, devoured of snobbishness and dazzled by what you have heard and read of the glories of fashionable society in the metropolis. You will be incredulous, because you, too, like the overwhelming majority of the comfortable classes in this great democracy—and many of the not so comfortable classes as well—because you, too, are infected of the mania for looking about for some one who refuses to associate with you on the ground that you are “common,” and for straightway making it your heart’s dearest desire to compel that person to associate with you. You will be incredulous when I tell you my sole reason was my hatred and horror of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

what seemed to me the degrading, vulgar, and rotten longings that filled my wife and that had infected my daughter. That hatred and horror had thrown me into a state of mind I did not dare confess to myself. You are incredulous; but perhaps you will admit I may be truthful when I explain that the reason for my moral and sentimental revolt was perhaps in large part my dense ignorance of the whole society side of life.

No doubt in the Passaic public school of my boyhood there had been as much snobbishness as there is in Fifth Avenue. But I had somehow never happened to notice it. It must have been there; it must be elemental in human nature; how else account for my wife? We hear more about the snobbishness of Fifth Avenue than we do about the snobbishness of the tenements. But that is solely because Fifth Avenue is more conspicuous. Also, Fifth Avenue, supposedly educated, supposedly broadened by knowledge and taste, has no excuse for petty vanities that belong only to the ignorant. And if Fifth Avenue were really educated, really had knowledge and taste, it could not be snobbish. However, my busy life had never been touched by social snobbishness. I preferred to know and to associate with men better educated and richer than I, but for excellent practical reasons—because from such men I could get the knowledge and the wealth I needed. But I would not have wasted a moment of my precious time upon the men most exalted in fashionable life—the ignorant incompetents who had inherited their wealth. They seemed ridiculous and worthless to me, a man of thought and action.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

So, the sudden exposure of my wife's and my little girl's disease gave me a shock hardly to be measured by the man or woman used all his life to the social craze. It was much as if I had suddenly seen upon their bared bosoms the disgusting ravages of cancer.

As I could not devise any line of action that, however faintly, promised results, I kept away from home. I absorbed myself in some new enterprises that filled my evenings, which I spent at my club with the men I drew into them. At the mention of club, gentle reader, I see your ears pricking. You are wondering what sort of club *I* belonged to. I shall explain.

It was the Amsterdam Club. You may have seen and gawked at its vast and imposing red sandstone front in middle Fifth Avenue. As you drove by in the "rubber-neck" wagon, the man with the megaphone may have shouted: "The Amsterdam Club, otherwise known as the Palace of Plutocracy. The total wealth of its members is one tenth of the total wealth of the United States. Every great millionaire in New York City belongs to it. The reason you see no one in the magnificent windows is because the plutocrats are afraid of cranks with pistol or bomb." And you stared and envied and craned your neck backward as the sight-seeing car rolled on. A fairly accurate description of my club. But you will calm as I go on to tell you the inside truth about it. It was built to provide a club for those rich men of New York who had no social position, and so could not be admitted to the fashionable clubs. It was not built by those outcasts

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

for whom it was intended, but by the rich men of the fashionable world. They did not build it out of pity nor yet out of generosity, but for freedom and convenience.

You must know that the rich, both the fashionables and the excludeds, are intimately associated in business. Now, in the days before the Amsterdam Club, if a rich fashionable wished to talk business out of office hours with a rich unfashionable, he had to take him to his home or to his club, one or the other. You will readily appreciate that either course involved disagreeable complications. The rich unfashionable would say: "Why am I not invited to this snob's house *socially*? Why does not this hound see that I am elected to his elegant club? I'll teach this wrinkle-snout how to spit at me. I'll slip a stiletto into his back, damn him." As the number of rich unfashionables increased, as the number of stealthy financial stilettoings for social insult grew and swelled, the demand for a "way out" became more clamorous and panicky. The final result was the Amsterdam Club—perhaps by inspiration, perhaps by accident. And so it has come to pass that now, when a rich fashionable wishes to talk finance with a rich pariah, he does not have to run the risk of defiling his home or his exclusive club. With the gracious cordiality wherefor aristocracy is famed in song and story, he says: "Let us go to *our* club"—for, the rich fashionables see to it that every rich pariah is elected to the Amsterdam immediately he becomes a person of financial consequence. And I fancy that not one in ten of the rich pariah members dreams how he is being insulted and

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

tricked. All, or nearly all, imagine they are elected by favor of the great fashionable plutocrats to about the most exclusive club in New York. Also, not one in a dozen of the fashionable members appreciates how he is degrading himself—for, to my quaint mind, the snob degrades only himself.

Well! Not many months after we moved from Brooklyn to Manhattan I was elected to the Amsterdam—I, in serene ignorance of the trick that was being played upon me by my sponsors, associates in large financial deals and members of several exclusive really fashionable clubs. They pulled regretful faces as they talked of the “long waiting lists at most of the clubs.” They brightened as they spoke of the Amsterdam—“the finest and, take it all round, the most satisfactory of the whole bunch, old man. And we believe we’ve got pull enough to put you in there pretty soon. We’ll work it, somehow.” If I had known the shrivel-hearted trick behind their genial friendliness, I should not have minded, should probably have laughed. For, human littlenesses do not irritate me; and I have a vanity—I prefer to call it a pride—that lifts me out of their reach. I am of the one aristocracy that is truly exclusive, the only one that needs no artificial barriers to keep it so. But I shall not bore you, gentle reader, by explaining about it. You are interested only in the aristocracies of rank and title and wealth that are nothing but the tawdry realization of the tawdry fancies of the yokel among his kine and the scullery maid among her pots. For, who but a tossed-up yokel or scullery maid would indulge in such vulgarities as sitting upon



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

a gold throne or living in a draughty, cheerless palace or seeking to make himself more ridiculous by aggravating his littleness with a title, like the ass in the lion's skin? Did it ever occur to you, gentle reader, that aristocracy is essentially common, essentially vulgar? To a large vision the distinction between king and carpenter, between the man with a million dollars and the million men with one dollar looks trivial and unimportant. Only a squat and squinting soul in a cellar and blinking through the twilight could discover agitating differences of rank between Fifth Avenue and Grand Street, between first floor front and attic rear, between flesh ripening to rot in silk and flesh ripening to rot in cotton. To an infinitesimal insect an infinite gulf yawns between the molecules of a razor's edge.

I often found my club a convenience, for in those busiest days of my financial career I had much private conferring—or conspiring, if you choose. Never had I found it so convenient as when for the first time there was pain and shrinking at the thought of going home, of seeing my wife and Margot. My Margot! When she was a baby how proudly I had wheeled her along the sidewalks of Passaic in the showy perambulator we bought for her—and the twenty-five dollars it cost loomed mighty big even to Edna. And in Brooklyn, what happy Sundays Edna and I had had with her, when I would hire a buggy at the livery stable round the corner and we would go out for the day to some Long Island woods; or when we would take her down to the respectable end of Coney Island to dig in the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

sand and to wade after the receding tide. My Margot! No longer mine; never again to be mine.

One evening I had an appointment at the Amsterdam with a Western millionaire, Charles Murdock, whom I had interested in a Canada railway to tap a Hudson Bay spruce forest. He was having trouble with his wife and something of it had come out in the afternoon newspapers. At the last moment his secretary—who, by the way, afterwards married the divorced Mrs. Murdock—telephoned that Murdock could not keep his engagement to dine. I looked about for some one to help me eat the dinner I had ordered. There are never many disengaged men in the Amsterdam. The fashionable rich come only when they have business with the pariahs. The pariahs prefer their own houses or the barrooms and cafés of the big hotels. I therefore thought myself lucky when I found Bob Armitage sulking in a huge leather chair and got him to share my dinner. Armitage was one of my railway directors. He had helped me carry through the big stroke that made me, had joined in half a dozen of my enterprises in all of which I had been successful. There was no man of my acquaintance I knew and liked so well as Armitage. Yet it had so happened that we had never talked much with each other, except about business.

It promised to be a silent dinner. He was as deep in his thoughts as I was in mine—and our faces showed that neither of us was cogitating anything cheerful. On impulse I suddenly said:

“Bob, do you know about fashionable New York society?”

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I knew that he did; that is to say, I had often heard he was one of the heavy swells, having all three titles to fashion—wealth, birth, and marriage. But I now pretended ignorance of the fact; when you wish to inform yourself thoroughly on a subject you should always select an expert, tell him you know nothing and bid him enlighten you from the alphabet up.

“Why do you ask?” said Armitage. “Do you want to get in? I had a notion you didn’t care for society—you and your wife.”

Armitage didn’t go to Holy Cross, but to St. Bartholomew’s. So he had never known of my wife’s activities, knew only the sort of man I was.

“Oh, I forgot,” he went on. “You’ve a daughter almost grown. I suppose you want her looked after. All right. I’ll attend to it for you. Your wife won’t mind my wife’s calling? I’d have sent her long ago—in fact, I apologize for not having done it. But I hate the fashionable crowd. They bore me. However, your wife may like them. Women usually do.”

It was at my lips to thank him and decline his offer. Then it flashed into my mind that perhaps my one hope of getting back my wife and daughter, of restoring them to sanity, lay in letting them have what they wanted. Another sort of man might have deluded himself with the notion that he could set his foot down, stamp out revolt, compel his family to do as he willed. But I happen not to be of that instinctively tyrannical and therefore inherently stupid temperament.

Armitage ate in silence for a few moments, then said:

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I'll have you elected to the Federal Club."

"This club is all I need," said I.

He smiled sardonically. I didn't understand that smile then, because I didn't know anything about caste in New York. "You let me look after you," said he. "You're a child in the social game."

"I've no objection to remaining so," said I.

"Quite right. There's nothing in it," said he. "But you must remember you're living in a world of rather cheap fools, and they are impressed by that nothing. On the other side of the Atlantic the social prizes have a large substantial value. Over here the value's small. Still it's something. You wouldn't refuse even a trading stamp, would you?"

I laughed. "I refuse nothing," said I. "I take whatever's offered me. If I find I don't want it, why, what's easier than to throw it away?"

"Then I'll put you in the Federal Club. You could have made me do it, if you had happened to want it. So, why shouldn't I do it anyhow, in appreciation of your forbearance? You don't realize, but I'm doing for you what about two thirds of the members of this club would lick my boots to get me to do for them."

"I had no idea the taste for shoe polish was so general here," said I.

"It's a human taste, my dear Loring," replied he. "It's as common as the taste for bread. All the men have it. As for the women they like nothing so well. Having one's boots licked is the highest human joy. Next comes licking boots."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You don't believe that?" said I, for his tone was almost too bitter for jest.

"You aren't acquainted with your kind, old man," retorted he.

"I don't know the kind you know," said I. And then I remembered my wife and my daughter. There must be truth in what Armitage had said; for, my beautiful wife and my sweet daughter, both looking so proud—surely they could not be rare exceptions in their insensibility to what seemed to me elemental self-respect.

"You don't know your kind," he went on, "because you don't indulge in cringing and don't encourage it. You're like the cold, pure-minded woman who goes through the world imagining it a chaste and austere place because her very face silences and awes sensuality. You are part of the small advance guard of a race that is to come." He grinned satirically. "Perhaps you'll drop out in the next few months. We'll see."

When the silence was again broken, it was broken by me. "Do you know a school kept by a woman named Ryper?" I inquired.

"Sure I do," replied he. He gave me a shrewd laughing glance. "The daughter isn't learning anything?"

"Nothing but mischief," said I.

"That's what Ryper's for. But what does it matter? Why should a woman learn anything? They're of no consequence. The less a man has to do with them the better off he will be."

"They're of the highest consequence," said I bit-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

terly. "They have the control of the coming generation."

"And a hell of a generation it's to be," cried he, suddenly rousing from the state of bored apathy in which he seemed to pass most of his time. "You've got me started on the subject that's a craze with me. I have only one strong feeling—and that is my contempt for woman—the American woman. I'm not speaking about the masses. They don't count. They never did. They never will. No one counts until he gets some education and some property. I suppose the women of the masses do as well as could be expected. But how about the women of the classes with education and property? Do you know why the world advances so slowly?—why the upper classes are always tumbling back and everything has to be begun all over again?"

"I've a suspicion," said I. "Because the men are fools about the women."

"The sex question!" cried Armitage. "That's the only question worth agitating about. Until it's settled—or begins to be settled—and settled right, it's useless to attempt anything else. The men climb up. The women they take on their backs become a heavier and heavier burden—and down they both drop—and the children with them. Selfish, vain, extravagant mothers, crazy about snobbishness, bringing up their children in extravagance, ignorance and snobbishness—that's America to-day!"

"The men are fools about the women, and they let the women make fools of themselves."

"The men are fools—but not about the women,"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

said Armitage. "How much time and thought for your family have you averaged daily in the last ten years?"

"I've been busy," said I. "I've had to look out for the bread and butter, you know."

"Exactly!" exclaimed he, in triumph. "You think you're fond of your family. No doubt you are. But the bottom truth is you're indifferent to your family. I can prove it in a sentence: You attend to anything you care about; and you haven't attended to them."

I stared at him like a man dazzled by a sudden light—which, in fact, I was.

"Guilty or not guilty?" said he, laughing.

"Guilty," said I.

"The American man, too busy to be bothered, turns the American woman loose—gives her absolute freedom. And what is she? A child in education, a child in experience, a child in taste. He turns her loose, bids her do as she likes—and, up to the limit of his ability gives her all the money she wants. He prefers her a child. Her childishness rests his tired brain. And he doesn't mind if she's a little mischievous—that makes her more amusing."

"You are married—have children," said I, too serious to bother about tact. "How is it with you?"

He laughed cynically. "Don't speak of my family," said he. "I tried the other way. But I've given up—several years ago. What can *one* do in a crazy crowd?"

"Not much," confessed I, deeply depressed.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"The women stampede each other," he went on. "Besides, no American woman—none that I know—has been brought up with education enough to enable her to make a life for herself, even when the man tries to help her. To like an occupation, to do anything at it, you've got to understand it. Being a husband and father is an occupation, the most important one in the world for a man. Being a wife and mother is an occupation—the most important one in the world for a woman. Are American men and women brought up to those occupations—trained in them—prepared for them? The most they know is a smatter at the pastime of lover and mistress—and they're none too adept at that."

"I believe," said I, "that in my whole life I've never learned so much in so short a time."

"It'll do you no good to have learned," rejoined Armitage. "It will only make you sad or bitter, according to your mood. Or, perhaps some day you may reach my plane of indifference—and be amused."

"Nothing is hopeless," said I.

"The American woman is hopeless," said he. "Her vanity is triple-plated, copper-riveted. She's hopeless so long as the American man will give her the money to buy flattery at home and abroad; for, so long as you can buy flattery, you never find out the truth about yourself. And the American man will give her the money as long as he can, because it buys him peace and freedom. He doesn't want to be bothered with the American woman—except when he's in a certain mood that doesn't last long."



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"There are exceptions," said I—not clear as to what I meant.

"Yes—there are exceptions," said he. "There are American men who spend time with the American woman. And what does she do to them? Look at the poor asses!—neglecting their business, letting their minds go to seed. They don't make her wise. She makes them foolish—as foolish as herself—and her children."

You may perhaps imagine into what a state this talk of Armitage's threw me. He was talking generalities. But every word he spoke went straight home to me. He had torn the coverings from my inmost family life, had exposed its soul, naked and ugly, to my fascinated gaze.

He finished dinner, lighted a cigarette—sat back watching me with a mysterious smile, half amused, wholly sympathetic, upon his handsome face, younger than his forty-five years—for he was considerably older than I. I was hardly more than barely conscious of that look of his, or of his presence. Suddenly I struck my fist with violence upon the arm of my chair. And I said:

"I *will* do something! It is *not* hopeless!"

He shook his head slowly, at the same time exhaling a cloud of smoke. "I tried, Godfrey," said he, "and I had a better chance of success than you could possibly have. For my wife had been brought up by a sensible father and mother in a sensible way, and she had been used to fashionable society all her life and, when I married her, seemed to have proved herself im-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

mune. A few years and—" His cynical smile may not have been genuine. "She leads the simpletons. But you'll see for yourself."

"When you know what to do, and feel as you do," said I, "why did you suggest our going into your society?"

"It isn't mine," laughed he. "It's my wife's. It doesn't belong to the men. It belongs to the women."

"Into your wife's society?" persisted I.

"Why did I suggest it? Because I wished to please you, and I know you like to please your wife. And she's an American woman—therefore, society mad. She has her daughter at the Ryper joint, hasn't she?"

I sat morosely silent.

"Oh, come now! Cheer up!" cried he, with laughing irony. "After all, you can't blame the American woman. She has no training for the career of woman. She has no training for any serious career. She's got to do something, hasn't she? Well, what is there open to her but the career of lady? That doesn't call for brains or for education or for taste. The dressmaker and milliner supply the toilet. The architect and decorator and housekeeper and staff supply the grand background. Father or husband supplies the cash. A dip into a novel or book of culture essays supplies the gible-gabble. A nice easy profession, is lady—and universally admired and envied. No, Loring, it isn't fair to blame her."

We strolled down Fifth Avenue. After he had watched the stream of elegant carriages and automo-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

biles, some of the too elegant automobiles having their interiors brightly lighted that the passersby might not fail to see the elaborate toilets of the occupants—after he had observed this procession of extravagance and vanity, with only an occasional derisive laugh or “Look there! Don’t miss that lady!” he burst out again in his pleasantly ironical tone:

“How fat the women are getting!—the automobile women! And how the candy shops are multiplying. Candy and automobiles!—and culture. Let us not forget culture.”

“No, indeed,” said I grimly. “Let’s not forget the culture.”

“I was telling my wife yesterday,” said Armitage, “what culture is. It is talking in language that means nothing about things that mean less than nothing. But watch the ladies stream by, all got up in their gorgeous raiment and jewels. What have they ever done, what are they doing, that entitles them to so much more than their poor sisters scuffling along on the sidewalk here?”

“They’ve talked and are talking about culture,” said I. “And don’t forget charity.”

“Ah—charity!” cried he gayly. “Thank you. I see we understand each other.” He linked his arm affectionately in mine. “Charity! It’s the other half of a lady’s occupation. Charity! Having no fancy for attending to her own business, she meddles in the business of the poor, tempting them to become liars and paupers. Your fine lady is a professional patronizer. She has no usefulness to contribute to the world.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

So, she patronizes—the arts with her culture—the poor with her charity, and the human race with her snobbishness.”

He was so amused by his train of thought that he lapsed into silence the more fully to enjoy it; for, every thought has its shadings that cannot be expressed in words yet give the keenest enjoyment. When he spoke again, it was to repeat:

“And what have these ladies done to entitle them to this luxury? Are they, perchance, being paid for giving to the world, and for inspiring, the noble sons and daughters who drive coaches and marry titles?”

“But what do we men do? What do *I* do—that entitles me to so much more than that chap perched on the hansom? I often think of it. Don’t you?”

“Never,” laughed Armitage. “I never claw my own sore spots. There’s no fun in that. Always claw the other fellow’s. There’s a laugh and distraction for your own troubles in seeing him wince.”

“Is that why you’ve been clawing mine?” said I.

We were pausing before his big house, at the corner of the Avenue. “If I have been I didn’t know it,” said he. He glanced up at his windows with a satirical smile. “This evening I’ve been breaking my rule and clawing at my own.” He put out his hand. “Let the social business take its course,” advised he with impressive friendliness. “You and I can’t make the world over. To fight against the inevitable merely increases everyone’s discomfort.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said I.

I agreed with his conclusion that it was best to let

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

things alone, though I reached that conclusion by a different route. I had in mind my forlorn hope of good results from a homeopathic treatment. I saw how impossible it was to undo the practically completed training of a grown girl. I appreciated the absurdity of an attempt radically to change Edna's character—an absurdity as great as an attempt to make her a foot taller or to alter the color of her eyes. The one hope, it seemed to me—and I still think I was right—was that, when they had social position, when there should no longer be excuse for fretting lest some one were thinking them common, they might calm down toward some sort of sanity.

Bear in mind, please, that at the time I did not have the situation, nor any idea of it, and of how to deal with it, definitely and clearly in mind. I was groping, was seeing dimly, was not even sure that I saw at all. I was like a thousand other busy American men who, after years of absorption in affairs, are abruptly and rudely awakened to the fact that there is something wrong at home where they had been flattering themselves everything was all right.

The things Armitage had said occupied my mind, almost to the exclusion of my business. The longer I revolved them, the better I understood the situation at home. I could not but wonder what wretched catastrophe in his domestic life had made him so insultingly bitter against women. I felt that he was unfair to them; any judgment that condemned a class for possessing universal human weakness must be unfair. At the same time I believed he had excuse for being un-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

fair—the excuse of a man whose domestic life is in ruins. I began to see toward the bottom of the woman question—the nature and the cause of the crisis through which women were passing.

The modern world, as I had read history enough to know, had suddenly and completely revolutionized the conditions of life. The male sex, though poorly where at all equipped to meet the new conditions, still was compelled to meet them after a fashion. A river that for ages has moved quietly along in a deep bed, all in a night swells to many times its former size and plays havoc with the surrounding country. That was a fairly good figure for the new life science and machinery had suddenly forced upon the human race. The men living in the inundated region—where floods were unknown, where appliances, even ideas for combating them did not exist—the men, hastily, hysterically, incompetently, but with resolution and persistence, because forced by dire necessity, would proceed to deal with that vast new river. Just so were the men of our day dealing with the life of steam and electricity, of ancient landmarks of religion and morality swept away or shifted, of ancient industrial and social relations turned upside down and inside out. The men were coping with the situation after a fashion. But the women?

These unfortunate creatures, faced with the new conditions, were in their greater ignorance and incapacity and helplessness, trying to live as if nothing had occurred!—as if the old order still existed. And the men, partly through ignorance, partly through pre-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

occupation with the new order, partly through indifference and contempt veiled as consideration for the weaker sex, were encouraging them in their fatal folly. Was it strange that the women were deceived, remained unconscious of their peril? No, it was on the contrary inevitable. When men, though working away under and at the new conditions, still talked as if the old conditions prevailed, when preachers still preached that way, and orators still eulogized the thing that was dead and buried as if it lived and reigned, when in order to find out the change you had to disregard the speech, the professions, the confident assertions of all mankind and observe closely their actions only—when there was this universal unawareness and unpreparedness, how could the poor women be condemned?

I could not but admit to myself that in his account of the doings of the women Armitage was only slightly if at all exaggerating. But with my more judicial temperament that had won me fortune and leadership while hardly more than a youth, I could not join him in damning the women for their folly and idleness and uselessness.

So, the immediate result of Armitage's talk was a gentler and thoroughly tolerant frame of mind toward my wife, both as to herself and as to what she had done to our daughter. After all, I had for wife only the typical woman—and a rarely sweet and charming example of the type. And my daughter was no worse, perhaps was better, than the average girl of her age and position. What did I think I had—or ought to have—in the way of wife and daughter, anyhow?

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

What was this vague, sentimental dream of family life? If I were by some magic to find myself possessed of the sort of family I thought I wanted, wouldn't I be more dissatisfied than at present? When I had a wife and a daughter who *looked* so well and did nothing but what everyone around me regarded as right and proper, was I not unjust in my discontent?

I had not seen Edna or Margot for several days before my talk with Bob Armitage. I did not see Edna for several days afterwards, though I dined at home every evening and did not go out after dinner. I was debating how to make overtures toward a reconciliation when she came into my study. She had an air of coldness and constraint—the air of the woman who is inflicting severe punishment upon an offending husband by withholding herself from him. She said:

“Mrs. Robert Armitage has asked me to dine on Thursday evening.”

I replied hesitatingly: “Thursday— I've an engagement for Thursday—a dinner.”

In her agitation she did not note that I had not finished. Dropping her coldness, she flashed out fiercely:

“We've simply *got* to accept! It's our chance. We may not have it again. It's what I've been waiting for ever since we moved to this house. And I can't go alone. Oh, how selfish you are! You never think of anything but your own comfort. And you can't or won't realize any of the higher things of life for which I'm striving. It is too horrible!”

If any male reader of this story has known a



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

woman who was, up to a certain time, always able to rouse a strong emotion in him—of love or anger, of pleasure or pain—a woman toward whom he could not be lukewarm, and if that reader can recall the day on which he faced that woman in a situation of stress and found himself calm and patient and kind toward her——

I was surprised to find that Edna was not moving me. Her loveliness did not stir a single tiny flame of passion. Her abuse did not excite resentment or dread. "Just a moment, my dear," said I with the tranquillity of a judge. "I was trying to say that I would break my engagement."

I saw that she did not believe me but imagined her outburst had terrified and cowed me into submission. How dispassionately I observed and judged!

"Accept, if you wish," I went on. "I like Armitage. We've been friends for years."

"Why didn't you tell me so?" demanded she. "Why have you been plotting against me all this time?"

"You forbade me to speak of business," said I. "So I have never spoken of my business friends."

Her anger against me was almost beyond control. If she had been a lady born, if she had not had a past to live down, a childhood of vulgar surroundings and actions, she would have given way and abused like a fish wife. A lady born dares excesses of passion that a made lady, with her deep reverence for the ladylike, would shrink from. She said through clinched teeth:

"I find out that Mrs. Armitage, the leader of the

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

younger set, the most fashionable woman in New York, has been eager to know me for a long time. And *you* have been preventing it!"

"How?" said I, amused, but not showing it.

"She called here the other day. She was as friendly as could be. We became friends at once. She said that for months she had been at her husband to get her leave to call on me, but that he and you, between you, had neglected to arrange it."

I saw how this notion of the matter delighted her, and that the truth would enrage her, would make her dislike me more than ever. So, I held my peace and thought, for the first time, I believe, how tiresome a woman without a sense of humor could become—how tryingly tiresome.

"She and I are going to do a lot of things together," continued Edna in the same intense humorless way. "I always knew that if I got a chance to talk with one of those women who could appreciate me, I'd have no further trouble. I knew I was wasting time on those religious fakirs and frumps, but I was always hoping that through them I'd somehow meet a woman of my own sort. Now I've met her, and something tells me I'll have no further trouble."

"Probably you're right," said I.

"How it infuriates me," she went on, "to think I'd have been spared all the humiliations and heart-aches I've suffered, if you had used your influence with Robert Armitage months—years ago. But no—you don't want me to get on. You wanted to stick in the mud. So I had to suffer—and Margot, too."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Well, it's all right now," said I, probably as indifferently as I felt. Why had God seen fit to create women without the sense of humor? Perhaps to save men from falling altogether under their rule.

"The sufferings of that poor child!" cried Edna. "And the very day after Mrs. Armitage came, Gracie Fortescue asked her to a party, and all the girls have taken her up. Gracie Fortescue is a niece of Hilda Armitage. Her brother married a Fortescue."

"Really?" said I. "And Margot is happy?"

"No thanks to you," retorted Edna sourly.

"Well, plunge in, my dear," said I, beginning to examine the papers before me on the desk. "Only—spare me as much as possible. I need all my time and strength for my work."

"But you'll have to go with me to dinners, and to the opera occasionally. I can't do this thing altogether alone."

"Say I'm an invalid. Say I'm away. They don't want me, anyhow. Armitage doesn't go with his wife."

"But that's different," cried she in a fever. "*She* has always had social position. It doesn't matter if people do talk scandal about her. *I* can't afford to cause gossip."

"Why should they gossip? But no matter. I don't want to worry with that—that higher life, let us call it. Or to be worried with it. Do the best you can for me. I'm a man's man—always have been—always shall be. If you've got to have a man to take you about, dig up one somewhere. I'm willing to pay him well."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Always money!" exclaimed she in deep disgust.

I laughed. "Not a bad thing, money," said I.

"It would never have got me Mrs. Armitage's friendship," said she loftily.

"You think so?" said I amiably. "All right, if it pleases you. But—take my advice, my dear—enjoy yourself to the limit with highfaluting *talk* about the worthlessness of money and that sort of rot. But don't for a minute lose your point of view and convince yourself."

"Thank God I've got a vein of refinement, of idealism in my nature," said Edna. "I wouldn't have as sordid an opinion of human nature as you have for anything in the world."

"You can afford not to have it, my dear," said I. "So long as I know the truth, and so make the necessary money to keep us going, you are free to indulge your lovely delusions. Have your beautiful, unmercenary friendship with Mrs. Armitage and the other ladies. I'll continue to make it financially worth their husbands' while to encourage the friendships."

"I thought so!" cried she. "You believe Mrs. Armitage has taken me up for business reasons."

"If you had been some poor woman—" I began mildly.

"Don't be absurd!" cried my wife. "How could there be an equal and true friendship between Mrs. Armitage and a woman with none of the surroundings of a lady, and with no means of gratifying the tastes of a lady? But that doesn't mean that Mrs. Armitage is a low, sordid woman. She has a beautiful nature.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Money is merely the background of high society. It simply gives ladies and gentlemen the opportunity to set the standards of dress and manners and taste. And of course they're careful whom they associate with. Who wants to be annoyed by adventurers and climbers and all sorts of dreadful mercenary, self-seeking people? "

"Who, indeed?" said I.

It gently appealed to my sense of the ridiculous, to see my wife thus changed in a twinkling into a defender and exponent of fashionable society. It was so deliciously feminine, as fantastically humorless, her sincere belief in the poppycock she was reeling off—the twaddle with which Mrs. Armitage had doubtless stuffed her. The sordidness, the vulgarity, the meanness, the petty cruelty, the snobbishness of fashionable people—all forgotten in a moment, hastily covered deep with the gilt and the tinsel of hypocritical virtues. What an amusing ass the human animal is! How stupidly unconscious of its own motives! How eagerly it attributes to itself all kinds of high motives for the ordinary, or scrubby, or downright mean actions—and attributes the same motives to its fellow asses, to make its own pretenses the more plausible! An amusing ass—but it would be more amusing if it were not so monotonously solemn, but laughed at itself occasionally.

However——

The atmosphere of our home now steadily improved. The servants began to respect us, where they had despised and had scarcely troubled themselves to conceal their contempt. The cook sent up more attractive—

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

though I fear even less digestible—dishes. The butler addressed me with a gratifying servility. The maids developed unexpected talents, showing acquaintance with the needs and customs of a fashionable household. The housekeeper's soul dropped from its theretofore insolently erect posture to all fours, and she attended to her duties. Edna became sweet and gracious. Margot grew merry and affectionate. All the result of Mrs. Armitage. We had been pariahs; we were of the elect.

I saw and felt the change distinctly at the time. But it is only in retrospect that I take the full measure—get its full humor—and pathos.

That Armitage dinner was *the* event of Edna's life. She had been born; she had married; she had given birth—all memorable and important occurrences. But this formal début in fashionable society topped them as the peak tops the foothills. Having seen her quivering and hysterical excitement when we were leaving the house, I feared a breakdown. I marveled at her apparent calmness and ease as we entered the dining room of the Armitages. Never had she looked so well. If Mrs. Armitage had not been a self-satisfied beauty of the dark type she might have demolished Edna's dream in its very realizing. But no doubt Edna, the shrewd, had duly measured Hilda Armitage and had discovered that it was safe to make her proud of the woman she had taken under protection and patronage.

There were but a dozen people in all at the dinner. It did not seem to be much of an affair. The drawing-room was plain—nothing gaudy, nothing costly look-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ing. Our own dining room was much grander—to our then uneducated taste. The guests were—just people—simple, good-natured mortals, perfectly at their ease and putting us at our ease. You would have wondered, after five minutes of that company, how anyone could possibly find any difficulty in getting intimately acquainted with them. But, as Edna knew at a glance, she and I were in the midst of the innermost and smallest circle of the many circles one within another that make up New York fashionable society. If on the recommendation of the Armitages we should have the good fortune to be accepted by that circle of circles, that circle within the circles, there would be nothing of a social nature left for us to conquer in New York. I was ignorant of all this at the time; had I known, I imagine I should have remained tranquil. But Edna knew at a glance; she had been studying these matters for years. It shows what force of character she had that she conducted herself as if it were the most ordinary and familiar occasion of her life. She had always said, even away back in the days of the grand forty-dollars-a-month flat in Passaic, that she belonged at the social top. She was undoubtedly right. The way she acted when she arrived there proved it.

You do not often have the chance, gentle reader, to get so well acquainted with any human being as I have enabled you to get with Edna. Probably you do not even know yourself so well. Therefore I suspect that you have a wholly false notion of her—think her in every way much worse relatively than she was. Through your novels and through the reports your dim eyes

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

bring to your narrow and shallow mind, you have acquired certain habits of judging your fellow beings.

You attach inflated importance to their unimportant surface qualities—physical appearance, pleasant voice and manner—and to their amiable little hypocrisies of apparent sweetness and generosity and friendliness. You do not see the real person—the human being. You, being by training a hypocrite and a believer in hypocrisies, scorn human beings. Now I prefer them to the sort of people with whom you and your false literature populate the world. In making you acquainted with Edna—and the others in my story—I have not introduced you to bad people, monsters, but to real beings of usual types, probably on the whole superior to your smug self in all the good qualities. Had you seen Edna in the Armitage house that evening you would have thought her as incapable of calculation and snobbishness as—well, as any of the others in that company whose whole lives were made up of calculation and snobbishness. She—and they—looked so refined and elevated. She—and they—talked so high-mindedly. I, who knew almost nothing at that time except business, was listener rather than talker; and you may be sure such a man as I, having such ignorance as mine to cover up, had in years of practice become somewhat adept in that saving art for the intelligent ignorant. But Edna——

She, the most expert of smatterers, fairly shone. With her beauty and vivacity, her eloquent eyes and dazzling smile, and exquisite bare shoulders, to aid her, she created an impression of brilliancy.



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You had a good time?" said I, when we were in the motor for the home journey.

"I never had as good a time in my life," she exclaimed, her voice tremulous with ecstasy. "Did I look well?"

"Never so well," said I. "And you made a hit."

"I was careful to cultivate the women," said she. "I've got to get the women."

"You've got them," I declared sincerely.

"You're sure I didn't make some of them jealous? Did you see any signs?"

"They liked you," said I.

"I had to play my cards well," pursued she. "It was a difficult position. I was far and away the best looking woman there, with the possible exception of Mrs. Armitage. Did you hear her call me Edna?"

"You and Mrs. Armitage look well together. You are of about the same figure, and the contrast of coloring is very good."

"That's why we took to each other so quickly. Each of us sets off the other."

"How did you like Armitage?" I asked.

"Oh, well enough," said she indifferently. "I hardly noticed him—or the other men. I had my game to play. The men don't count in the social game. It's the women. I shall be nervous until I find out whether I really got them. They are such cats!—so mean and sly and jealous. I *detest* women!"

"I prefer men, myself," said I.

"Men!" She laughed scornfully. "I think men are intolerable—American men. They say foreigners

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

are better. But American men—they know nothing but dull business or politics. They have no breadth—no idealism. The women are far superior to the men.”

I laughed. “No doubt you women are too good for us,” said I carelessly. “We’re grateful that you don’t scorn us too much even to accept our money.”

“How coarse that is! Don’t spoil the happiest evening of my life.”

We were at home, so she could escape from me. And I, for my part, was as glad to be quit of her society as she could possibly have been to get rid of me. I was beginning to realize that her conversation bored me, that it had always bored me, that it was her sex and only her sex that interested me. And latterly even this had lost its charm. Why?

I have observed—and perhaps you have observed it, too—that people of wealth and position, unless they have very striking individuality indeed, are usually utterly devoid of charm. It is difficult to become interested in them, to establish any sort of sympathetic current. And you will notice that fashionable functions are dull, essentially dull; that the animation is artificial, is supplied from without by an orchestra or entertainers, and fails to infect the company. It was long before I discovered the explanation for this. I at first thought it was the stupidity that comes from a surfeit of the luxuries and pleasures. But I am now convinced that this familiar explanation is not the true one; that the true one is the excessive, the really preposterous self-centeredness of people of rank and wealth. From waking until sleeping they are surrounded by hirelings and

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

sycophants who think and talk only of them. Thus the rich man or woman gets into the habit of concentrating upon self. Now the essence of charm is giving—giving oneself out in sympathetic interest in one's fellows. How can people, all whose faculties are trained to work in upon themselves—how can they have charm? An egotist, one who *talks* only of himself, may have charm because he gives you the impression that he is trying to please you, that he thinks you so important that he wishes you to be sensible of his importance. But the egotist who, whatever he *talks*, *thinks* only of himself—he is not only dull and bored but also a diffuser of dullness and boredom. And that is how their servants and their sycophants make the rich and the fashionable so dreary.

I imagine some such effect as this was being produced upon my wife by her surroundings of luxury. I think that may account for her long decreasing charm for me. At any rate, soon after she was well launched on her Elysian sea of fashion—that is to say, soon after she ceased to have any check of social seeking to restrain her from centering all her thoughts and actions upon herself, she lost the last bit of her charm for me. She became radiantly beautiful. Her face took on a serene and refinedly assured expression that made her extravagantly admired on every hand. She became gracious to me and almost as sweet as she had been before we moved to New York. She even let me see that, if I so desired, she would condescend to be on terms of wifely affection with me again. But I did not so desire. I liked her. I admired her energy, her

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

toilets, and, quite impersonally, her aristocratic beauty. But I was content to be a bachelor, and I was grateful when she began to relieve me of the tediousness of going about in her train.

My substitute was an architect, Leon MacIlvane by name—a handsome young fellow of about my wife's age, though he thought her much younger, despite Margot's age and appearance. With his poetic dark eyes and classic features, and rich, deep voice, MacIlvane had long been a favorite with the young married women of the Armitage set. He was indeed a valuable asset. The rich unmarried men were not especially interesting; also, they were needed by the marriageable girls. MacIlvane, not a marrying man and never making any mother uneasy by so much as an interested glance at a daughter intended for a rich husband, devoted himself to married women.

"I do not care for girls," he said to me. "They are too colorless."

"Why bother with women at all?" said I. "Aren't they all colorless? What do they know about life? What experience have they had?"

"An intelligent woman's mind is the complement of an intelligent man's mind," said he, as if this trite old fallacy were a brilliant discovery of his own making. "Women stimulate me, give me ideas."

"Oh, I see," said I practically. "Business. Yes, an architect does deal chiefly with the women."

"I didn't mean that," said he, showing as much anger as he dared show the husband of the woman to whom he had attached himself.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Where's the harm in it?" said I encouragingly. "You've got to make a living—haven't you? It's good sense for a business man to cultivate his customers."

He, the poseur and the small man, hated this plain truthful way of dealing with his profession. Like all chaps of that kidney he thought only of himself and of appearances, and sought to degrade a noble profession to the base uses of his vanity. In fact, he had begun with my wife because of the orders he hoped to get—for, he suspected that once she looked about her in the fashionable world from the new viewpoint of a fashionable person, she would want changes in her house to make it less vividly grand. He believed she would let Hilda Armitage educate her; and Hilda, unlike most of her friends, liked the quiet kinds of ostentation and costliness. And he guessed correctly. He was well paid for undertaking to replace me as escort—so far as I could be replaced without causing scandal—and, thank heaven, that was very far in the New York of busy and bored husbands, detesting the gaudy gaddings their wives loved.

Soon he was serving my wife for other reasons than pay. I saw something of him from time to time, and I presently began to note a change in his manner toward me—a formal politeness, an exaggeration of courtesy. I spoke to Armitage about it. Armitage and I had become the most intimate of friends—knocked about together in the evenings, were more closely associated than ever in business.

"Bob," said I to Armitage, "what ails that ass,

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

MacIlvane? He treats me as if he were in love with my wife."

Armitage laughed. "That's it," said he. "My wife's spaniel, Courtleigh, who writes poetry, treats me the same way. Get any anonymous letters yet?"

"Two," said I.

"Servants," said he. "I suppose you burnt them? You didn't show them to your wife?"

"Heavens, no," replied I. "Why unsettle her? Why upset a pleasant arrangement? My wife finds MacIlvane useful. I find him invaluable. He saves me hours of time. He spares me hours of boredom."

"My feeling about Courtleigh," said Armitage. "And both those chaps are comfortably trustworthy."

"I hadn't thought of MacIlvane in that way," said I. "I know my wife—and that's enough."

Armitage reflected with an amused smile on his face. Finally, he said: "I don't suppose there ever were since the world began so thoroughly trustworthy women as these American women of the fashionable crowd—those that have very rich husbands—and only those, of course, are really fashionable. They may flirt a little, but never anything serious—never anything that'd give their husbands an excuse for throwing them out—and lose them their big houses and big incomes and social leadership."

I had not thought of these aspects of the matter. I based my feeling of security solely on my knowledge of my wife's intense self-absorption. All the springs of sentiment—except the shallow spring of highfaluting talk—had dried up in her. She would listen to Mac-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Ilvane's flatteries as long as he cared to pour them out. But if he ever tried to get her to think of *him*, she would feel outraged.

"I suppose," pursued Armitage, "we'd be tremendously amused if we could overhear those chaps talking to our wives about us. They don't dare presume to the extent of mentioning our names. But they hand out generalities of roasting—how stupid most American men are, how superior the women are, what a tragic condescension for a wonderful American woman to have to live with a man who couldn't appreciate her."

I nodded and laughed.

"Nothing a woman loves so much—an American woman with a little miseducation befogging her mind and fooling her as to its limited extent—nothing she so dearly loves as to hear that she has a great intellect and a great soul, complex, mysterious, beyond the comprehension of the vulgar male clods about her. That's why they like foreigners. You ought to watch those foreign chaps flatter our women—make perfect fools of them."

But I had no desire to watch women in any circumstances. I had no active resentment against them as had Armitage. I simply wished to be let alone, to be free to pursue my ambitions and my ideas of self-development. I had ceased to feel about Margot. I was merely glad she was not a boy; for I felt that if she were a boy, I should have to assert myself and do some drastic and disagreeable—and almost certainly disastrous—disciplining in my family.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

About a year and a half after my wife achieved her ambition, I began to feel that she was spiritually bearing down upon me in pursuance of some new secret plan.

During the year and a half she had been playing the fashionable social game with the strenuous enthusiasm which only a woman—I had almost said only an American woman—seems able to inject into the pursuit of objects that are of no consequences whatsoever. And, in spite of the useful MacIlvane I had been compelled to assist her far more than was to my liking. I went about enough to get a thorough insight into fashionableness—and a profound distaste for it. Of the many phases, ludicrous, repellent, despicable, pitiful, there was one that made a deep impression upon me. It amazed me to find that the “best” class of people was, if possible, more vulgarly snobbish than the class from which I had come—even than the “Brooklyn bounders.” I could not comprehend—I cannot comprehend—how those who have had the best opportunities are no more intelligent, no broader of mind than those who have had no opportunities at all. The ignorance, the narrowness of the men and women of the comfortable classes!—the laziness of their minds!—the shallow cant about literature, art and the like! Really, intelligence, activity of mind, seems confined to the few who are pushing upward; and the masses of mankind in all classes seem contented each class with its own peculiar wallow of ignorance.

But to Edna's secret plan. If you are a married man you will at once understand what I mean when I



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

speak of having a vague sensation of being borne down upon. She said nothing; she did nothing. But I knew she was making ready to ask something to which she believed she could get my consent only by the use of all her tact and skill and charm—for she did not know her charms had ceased to charm, but thought them more potent than ever. I waited with patience and composure; and in due time she began cautious open approaches.

“Margot is almost ready to come out,” said she.

“Money?” said I, smiling.

She rebuked this coarseness amiably. “*Everybody* isn’t *always* thinking of money, dear,” said she.

“But why talk to *me* about anything else? That’s my only department in the family.”

She deigned a smile for my pleasantry, then went on in her usual serious way: “I wish to consult you about her education.”

“Oh—finish as you’ve begun,” said I. “I suppose it’s the best that can be done for a girl.”

“But I can’t find what I want,” said she, with an expression of sweet maternal solicitude. “I’ve always been determined Margot should have the best education any girl in the whole world could get.”

“Go ahead,” said I. “See that she gets it.”

“She shall have the perfect equipment of a lady—of a woman of the world,” continued Edna, with growing enthusiasm. “She has the beauty to set it off—and we can afford to give it to her. I am willing to make any sacrifices that may be necessary.”

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I pricked up my ears. I always do when anyone, male or female, uses that word sacrifice. I know a piece of selfishness is coming.

"As I was saying," pursued Edna, with the serene look of the self-confident woman who is taking her husband in firm, strong hands, "I have been unable to find what I want for her. Mrs. Armitage tells me I'll not find it except in Paris."

"Well—why not go to Paris?" said I.

Did you ever lift an empty box that you thought full and heavy? My wife looked as if she had just done that exceedingly uncomfortable thing. "But I don't see— I—I— It would be a terrible sacrifice to have to go and live in Paris," stammered she.

"Then don't do it," said I.

"But I must think of Margot!" exclaimed she hastily.

"Oh, Margot seems to be stepping along all right. She'll never miss what she doesn't know about."

"But you must realize, dear, what an education she'd get in Paris. And I suppose it would do me good, too. It's a shame that I don't speak French. Everyone except me speaks it. They all had French governesses when they were children."

"Some of them had—and some hadn't," said I. "Armitage has told me things about your friends that make me suspect they're doing fully as much bluffing as we are."

She winced, and sighed the sigh of the lady patient with a low husband. "Then you think I ought to go?" said she.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I think you ought to do as you like," said I. "I always have thought so. I always shall."

"And," continued she absently, "the society over there must be charming. Really, I need the education as much as Margot does. I do surprisingly well, considering what my early opportunities were."

"I've never once heard you give yourself away," said I.

"I'm not that stupid," replied she. "But—a while in France—on the Continent—and in England perhaps——"

"How long would you be gone?" interrupted I, to show her that all this beating round Robin's barn was superfluous.

She gave me a coquettish look: "How long could you spare me?"

"I can't tell till I've tried," said I, with a gallant smile—but with no move toward her. You women who would be wise, distrust the gallantry that is content with speech and look.

"You understand," pursued she, "if I started this thing I'd put it through—no matter how much I missed you or how homesick I was over there."

"You always do put things through," said I admiringly. "When have you planned to start?"

"I haven't planned at all, as yet," replied she—and I saw she thought I had set a trap for her, and was delighted with herself for having dodged it. Certainly never was there a husband with whom indirection was more unnecessary. Yet she would not realize this, partly because she had never bothered to discover what

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

manner of man I was, partly because she had one of those natures that move only by secrecy and indirection.

"Do you expect me to go over with you?" inquired I.

"I only wish you would!" exclaimed she, but I distrusted her enthusiasm.

"Couldn't MacIlvane take you over and settle you?"

Her face clouded. Her lip curled slightly. "I don't like him as I did," said she. "I've found out he's ridiculously vain and egotistical."

I laughed outright.

"What is it?" inquired she, elevating her eyebrows. She had always disapproved my sense of humor.

"So he's been making love to you—eh?" said I.

"No, indeed!" cried she, bridling haughtily. "He'd not dare. But I saw he was beginning to presume in that direction, and I checked him."

"Oh, he's harmless," said I. "Keep friendly with him. He'd be the very person to settle you in Paris. He lived there several years."

"It would cause scandal," said she. "If you can't go, I can do well enough alone, I'm sure."

"I'd only be in the way," said I. "Let me know when you wish to go, and I'll try to arrange it. But I can't get away for at least three months."

"That would be too late," said she. "Margot must be started at once. She hasn't any too much time before her coming out. Also, Mrs. Armitage is sailing in two weeks, and she would be a great help."

"Then you have decided to sail in two weeks?"

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

said I, adding before she had time to get beyond a gathering frown of protest, "That suits me. I'll make my own plans accordingly."

And in two weeks they sailed, I watching the big ship creep out of dock and drop slowly down the river. Armitage and I drove away from the pier together. We were in such high spirits that we had champagne with our lunch.

## VI

ARMITAGE and I were together every day. He attracted me for the usual reason of congeniality, and also because he was giving me a liberal education. I have never cared for books or, with two or three exceptions, for book men. About both there is for me an atmosphere of staleness, of tedium. I prefer to get what is in the few worth-while books through the medium of some clear and original mind—such a mind as Armitage had. He ought to have been a great man. No, he was a great man; what I mean to say is that his talents ought to have won his greatness recognition. He did not lack capacity or energy; he showed a high degree of both in the management and increase of his fortune. He lacked that species of vanity, I guess it is, which spurs a man to make himself conspicuous. Also he had a kind of laziness, and chose to be active only in the way that was easiest and most agreeable for him—the making of money.

His father had been rich, and his grandfather; his great-grandfather had been one of the richest men in Revolutionary times. His father was regarded as a crank because he had imagination, and therefore despised the conventional ideas of his own generation; to be regarded as thoroughly sane and sensible, you

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

must be careful to be neither, but to pattern yourself painstakingly upon the particular form of feeble-mindedness and conventional silliness current in your time. Armitage's father resolved that his son should not have his individuality clipped and moulded and patterned by college and caste into the familiar type of upper-class man. So Armitage went to public school, graduated from it into a factory, then into an office, himself earned the money to carry out the ambitions for study and travel with which his father had inspired him.

I think there was nothing worth the knowing about which Armitage had not accurate essential information—books, plays, pictures, music, literature, history, economics, science, medicine, law, finance. He was a good shot and a good horseman, could run an automobile, take it to pieces, put it together again. He was a practical mechanic and a practical railroad man. He had a successful model farm. “It doesn't take long to learn the essentials about anything,” said he, “if you will only put your whole mind on it and not let up till you've got what you want. And the trouble with most people—why, they are narrow and ignorant and incompetent—it isn't lack of mind, but lack of interest. They have no curiosity.” Nor was my friend Armitage a smatterer. He didn't try to *do* everything; he contented himself with knowledge, and *did* only one thing—made money out of railroads.

When he saw that I really wished to be educated, he amused himself by educating me. Not in a formal way, of course; but simply talking along, about what-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ever happened to come up. I have never known a man to get anywhere, who did not have an excellent memory. Lack of memory—which means lack of the habit and power of giving attention—is the cause of more failures than all other defects put together. If you don't believe it, test the failures you know; perhaps you might even test your own not too successful self. I had an unusual memory; and I don't think Armitage or anyone ever told me anything worth knowing that I did not stick to it and keep it where I could use it instantly.

Several months after his wife and mine departed, we were walking in the park one afternoon—the usual tramp round the upper reservoir to reduce or to keep in condition. He said in the most casual way:

“My wife is coming next week, and will get her divorce at once.”

Taking my cue from his manner I showed even less surprise than I felt. “This is the first I've heard of it,” said I.

“Really?” said he carelessly. “Everyone knows.” He laughed to himself. “She is to marry Lord Blankenship—the Earl of Blankenship.”

“And the children?” said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I don't know. Her people will look after them. She has spoiled them beyond repair. I have no interest in them—nor they in me.” After a little tramping in silence, he halted and rested his hands on the railing and looked away across the lakelike reservoir, its surface tossed up into white



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

caps by the wind. "I loved her when we were married," said he. "That caused all the mischief. I let her do as she pleased. She was a fine girl—good family but poor. She pretended to be in sympathy with my ideas." His lip curled in good-humored contempt. "I believed in her enthusiasm. My father—wonderfully sane old man—warned me she was only after our money, but I wouldn't listen. Tried to quarrel with him. He wouldn't have it—gave me my way. It's not strange I believed in her. She looked all that's high-minded—and delicate—and what they call aristocratic. Well, it *is* aristocratic—the reality of aristocracy."

"Perhaps she was sincere," said I, out of the depths of my own experience, "perhaps she honestly imagined she liked and wanted the sort of life you pictured. We are all hypocrites, but most of us are unconscious hypocrites."

"No doubt she did deceive herself—in part at least," he admitted. "For a year or so after our marriage she kept up the bluff. I didn't catch on—didn't find her out—until we began to differ about bringing up the children. Even then, I loved her so that I let her have her way until it was too late."

"But," said I, "don't you owe it to them to——"

He interrupted with an impatient, "Didn't I try? But it was hopeless. To succeed in this day, I'd have had to take the children away off into the woods, with the chances that even there the servants I'd be compelled to have would spoil them—would keep them reminded of the rotten snobbishness they've been taught." He

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

laughed at me with mocking irony. "You have a daughter," said he. "What about her?"

"I was thinking of your boy," said I.

He frowned and looked away. After a long pause—"Hopeless—hopeless," said he. "Believe me—hopeless. The boy is like her. No, I'll have to begin all over again."

I gave an inquiring look.

"Marry again," explained he. "Another sort of woman, and keep her and her children away from this world of ours. I'd like to try the experiment. But—" He laughed apologetically. "I'm afraid I love the city and its amusements too well. I'm not as determined nor as ardent as I once was. What does it matter, anyway? So long as we are comfortable and well amused, why should we bother?" After a silence, "Another mistake I made—the initial mistake—was in giving her a fortune. She is almost as well fixed as I am. Don't make that mistake, Godfrey."

"I've already done it," said I. "And I shall never be sorry that I did. I gave my wife the first large sum I made, and I've added to it from time to time. I wanted her and Margot to be safe, no matter what happened to me."

"A mistake," he said. "A sad mistake. I know how you felt. I felt the same way. But there's something worse than the more or less sentimental aversion to being loved and considered merely for the money they can get out of you and can't get without you."

"Nothing worse," I declared.

"Yes," he replied. "It's worse to give a foolish

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

woman the power to make a fool of herself, of her children, and of you."

"That is bad, I'll admit," said I. "But the other is worse—at least to me."

"You'd refuse to make a child behave itself, through the selfish fear that it would hate you for doing so."

I laughed. "You know my weakness, I see," said I.

"There's the foolish American husband and father. No wonder all the classes that ought to be leaders in development and civilization are leaders only in luxury and folly."

"Oh, let them have a good time—what they call a good time," said I. "As you said a moment ago, it doesn't matter."

"If it only were a good time—to be ignorant and snobbish and lazy, to drive instead of walking, to eat and drink instead of thinking, to be waited upon instead of getting the education and the happiness that come from serving others. Don't laugh at me. After all, while you and I—all our sort of men—are greedy, selfish grabbers, making thousands work for us, still we do build up big enterprises, we do set things to moving, and we do teach men the discipline of regular work by forcing them to work for us at more or less useful things."

No doubt you, gentle reader, have fallen asleep over this conversation. I understand perfectly that it is beyond you; for you have no conception of the deep underlying principles of the relations of men and men or men and women. But there may be among my readers a few who will see interest and importance in this talk

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with Armitage. It is time the writers of stories concerned themselves with the realities of life instead of with the showy and sensational things that obscure or hide the realities. What would you think of the physiologist who issued a treatise on physiology with no mention or account of the blood? Yet you read stories about what purports to be life with no mention or account of money—this, when in any society money is the all-important factor. Put aside, if you can, the prejudices of your miseducation and æsthetics, of your false culture and your false refinement, open your mind, *think*, and you will see that I am right.

When we were well down toward the end of the Park, Armitage said: "Pardon me a direct question. Have you and your wife separated?"

"No," said I. "She has gone abroad to round out Margot's education—and her own."

"You know what that means?"

"In a general way," replied I. "I'm letting them amuse themselves. They don't need me, nor I them. Perhaps when they come back—" I did not finish my sentence.

He laughed. "That means you don't really care what happens when they come back."

My smile was an admission of the correctness of his guess. We dropped our domestic affairs and took up the matters that were more interesting and more important to us.

If you have good sight, unimpaired eyes, you go about assuming—when you think of it at all—that good sight is the rule in the world and impaired eyes the ex-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ception. But let your sight begin to fail, let your eyes become darkened, and soon you discover that you are one of thousands—that good sight is the exception, that almost everyone has something the matter with his eyes. The reason human beings know so little about human nature, the reason the sentimental flapdoodle about human virtues, in the present not very far-advanced stage of human evolution, is so widely believed and doubt of it so indignantly denounced as cynicism, lies in the fact that the average human being is ignorant of the afflictions of his own soul. This would be pleasant and harmless enough, and to destroy the delusion would be wickedly cruel, were it not that the only way to cure ailments of whatever sort is to diagnose them. What hope is there for the man devoured of a fever who fancies and insists that he is healthy? What hope is there for the man who eats pleasant-tasting slow poison under the impression that it is food? What a quaint notion it is that the truth, the sole source of health and happiness, is bad for some people, chiefly for those sick unto death through the falsehoods of ignorance and vanity! We humans are like the animal that claws and bites the surgeon who is trying to set its broken leg.

But I am wandering a little. Discover that you have any ailment of body or of soul, and you soon discover how widespread that ailment is. You do not even appreciate how widespread, incessant, and poignant are the ravages of death until your own family and friends begin to die off. I had no notion of the extent of the social or domestic malady of abandoned husbands and fathers until I became one of that curious class.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Among the masses there is the great and growing pestilence of abandoned wives—husbands, worn out by the uncertainties of the laboring man's income, and disgusted with the incompetence of their wives and with the exasperations of the badly brought up children—such husbands flying by tens of thousands to escape what they cannot cure or endure. Among the classes, from the plutocracy down to and through the small merchants and professional men, I now discovered that there was a corresponding and reversed disease—the abandoned husband.

The husband and father, working hard and presently accumulating enough for ease in his particular station of life, suddenly finds himself supporting, with perhaps all the money he can scrape together, a distant and completely detached family. He mails his money regularly, and with a fidelity that will appear grotesque, noble, or pitiful according to the point of view. In return he gets occasional letters from the loved ones—perfunctory these letters somehow sound, or would sound to the critical, though they are liberally sprinkled with loving, even fawning phrases, such as “dear, sweet papa” and “darling husband.” Where are “the loved ones?” If the family home is in a small town or country, they are in New York or some other city of America usually. If the family home is in the city, they are abroad. What are they doing? Sacrificing themselves! Especially poor wife and mother. She would infinitely prefer being at home with beloved husband. But she must not be selfish. She must carry her part of their common burden. While *he* toils to provide for the chil-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

dren, *she* toils in the loneliness or unhappiness of New York or Paris or Rome or Dresden or Genoa. And what is she toiling at in those desert places? Why, at educating the children!

Sometimes it's music. Sometimes it's painting. Again it's "finishing," whatever that may mean, or plain, vague "education." There was a time when men of any sort could be instantly abashed, silenced and abased by the mere pronouncing of the word education. That happy day for mental fakers is nearing its close. Now, at the sound of the sacred word many a sensible, practical man has the courage to put on a grin. I have been credited with saying that a revival of the declining child-bearing among American women might be looked for, now that they have found the usefulness of children as an excuse for escape from home and husband. I admit having said this, but I meant it as a jest. However, there is truth in the jest. I don't especially blame the women. Why should they stay at home when they have no sympathy with the things that necessarily engross the husband? Why stay at home when it bores them even to see that the servants carry on the house decently? Why stay at home when they simply show there from day to day how little they know about housekeeping? Why stay at home when there is an amiable fool willing to mail them his money, while they amuse themselves gadding about Europe or some big city of America?

Abandoned wives at the one end of the social scale, abandoned husbands at the other end. Please note that in both cases the deep underlying cause is the same—

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

money. Too little money, and the husband flies; too much money, and it is the wife who breaks up the family.

As soon as I discovered, by being elected to membership, the existence of the universal order of abandoned husbands I took the liveliest interest in it. I was eager to learn whether there was another fool quite so foolish as myself, also whether the other fools were aware of their own folly. I found that most of them were rather proud of their membership, indulged in a ludicrous cocking of the comb and waggling of the wattles when they spoke of "my family over on the other side for a few years," or of "my wife, poor woman, exiled in Paris to cultivate my daughter's voice," or of "my invalid wife—she has to live in the south of France. It's a sad trial to us both."

Then—but this came much later—I discovered that these credulous, money-mailing fools, including myself, were not quite so imbecile, as a class, as they seemed to be. I discovered that they were secretly, often unconsciously, glad to be rid of their uncongenial families, and regarded any money they mailed as money well spent. They toiled cheerfully at distasteful tasks to get the wherewithal to keep their loved ones far, far away!

The absence of Edna and Margot was an enormous relief to me. Edna was constantly annoying me to accompanying her to places to which I did not care to go. I like the theatre and I rather like some operas, but when I go to either it is for the sake of the performance. Going with Edna and her friends meant a tedious social function. We arrived late; we did not hear the play or



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the opera. As for the purely social functions, they were intolerable. Perhaps I should not have been so unhappy had I been the kind of man who likes to talk for the sake of hearing his own voice. Women are attentive listeners when the man who is talking is worth flattering. But I talk only for purpose, and when I listen I wish it to be to some purpose also. So, Edna, always urging me to do something distasteful or giving me the sense that she was about to ask me, or was irritated against me for being "disobliging"—Edna made me uncomfortable, increasingly uncomfortable as I grew more intelligent, more critical, more discriminating. As for Margot, I could not talk with her ten minutes without seeing protrude from her sweet loveliness some vulgarity of snob-bishness. It irritated me to hear her speak to a servant. I had to rebuke her privately several times for the tone she used in addressing her governess or my secretary—this when her mother and all her mother's friends used precisely the same repellant "gracious" tone in the same circumstances. I saw that she, sometimes instinctively, again deliberately tried to hide her real self from me, that I was making a hypocrite of her. Any sort of frankness or sympathy between her and me was impossible.

A few weeks after their departure I closed the house. It came to me that I need endure its discomforts no longer, that I could get rid of those smelly, dull-witted, low-minded foreign animals, that I need not endure food sent up from a kitchen as to which I had from time to time disgusting proofs that it was not clean. I closed the house and left the mice and roaches and other insects

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to such short provender as would be provided by caretaker and family. I took an apartment in a first-class hotel.

When Armitage got clear of his wife he took the adjoining apartment. And how comfortable and how cheerful we were!

The women with their incompetence and indifference have about destroyed the American home. To get good service, to have capable people assisting you, you must yourself be capable. The incapacity of the "ladies" has driven good servants out of the business of domestic service, has left in it only the worthless and unreliable creatures who now take care of the homes. If you find any part of the laboring class deteriorating, don't blame them. To do that is to get nowhere, is to be unjust and shallow to boot. Instead, look at the employers of that labor. Every time, you will find the fault is there, just as an ill-mannered or a bad child means unfaithful parents. The masses of mankind must have leadership, guidance, example. My experience has been that they respond when the dominating classes do their duty—that is, pay proper wages, demand good service, *and know what good service is.*

What a relief and a joy that hotel was! Armitage and I had our own cook, and so could have the simple dishes we liked. We attended to the marketing—and both knew what sort of meat and vegetables and fruit to buy, and were not long trifled with by our butcher, our grocer, and our dairyman, spoiled though they were by the ladies. And our apartments were clean—really clean, and after the first few weeks our servants were

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

contented, and abandoned the evil ways slipshod mistresses had got them into. Pushing my inquiries, I found that not only our hotel, but every first-class hotel in the fashionable district was filled with the remnants of shattered homes—husbands who had compelled their wives to give up the expensive and dirty attempts at housekeeping; husbands who had abandoned their families in country homes or in other cities and towns and had, surreptitiously or boldly, returned to bachelor bliss; husbands who had been abandoned by their families, none of these last cases being more heart-breaking than Armitage's or my own. The story ran that he was on the verge of melancholia because his beautiful wife had cast him off. There was no more truth in this than there would have been in a tale of my lonely grief. Had it not been for Armitage, pointing out to me the truth, I might have fancied myself a deserted unfortunate. It would not have been an isolated instance of a human being not knowing when he is well off.

I did not see my family again until the following spring. Business compelled me to go abroad, and they had come over to London for the season.

When I descended from the train at Euston, a little confused by the strangeness, I saw my wife a few yards down the platform. Beside her stood a tall, beautiful young woman, whom I did not instantly recognize as my daughter. Both were dressed with the perfection of taste and of detail that has made the American woman famous throughout the world. I like well-dressed women—and well-dressed men, too. I should certainly

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

have been convicted of poor taste had I not been dazzled by those two charming examples of fashion and style. They looked like two lovely sisters, the elder not more than five or six years in advance of the younger. I was a youthful-looking man, myself—except, perhaps, when I was in the midst of affairs and took on the air of responsibility that cannot appear in the face of youth. But no one would have believed there were so few years between Edna and me. Nor was she in the least made-up. The youth was genuinely there.

That meeting must have impressed the by-standers, who were observing the two women with admiring interest. I felt a glow of enthusiasm at sight of these elegant beauties. I was proud to be able to claim them. As for them, they became radiant the instant they saw me.

“Godfrey!” cried Edna loudly, rushing toward me.

“Papa—dear old papa!” cried Margot, waving her arms in a pretty gesture of impatient adoration while her mother was detaining me from her embrace.

“Well—well!” cried I. “What a pair of girls! My, but you’re tearing it off!”

They laughed gayly, and hugged and kissed me all over again. For a moment I felt that I had been missed—and that I had missed them. A good-looking, shortish and shy young man, dressed and groomed in the attractive English upper-class way of exquisiteness with no sacrifice of manliness, was now brought forward. “Lord Crossley—my husband,” said Edna.

“Pleased, I’m sure,” murmured the young man, giving me his hand with an awkwardness that was somehow

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

not awkward—or, rather, that conveyed a subtle impression of good breeding. “Now that you’ve got him—or that he’s got you,” proceeded he, “I’ll toddle along.”

My wife gave him her hand carelessly. “Until dinner,” she said.

Margot shook hands with him, and nodded and smiled. When he was gone I observed the carriage near which we were standing—and I knew at once that it was my wife’s carriage. It was a grand car of state, yet quiet and simple. I often looked at it afterwards, trying to puzzle out how it contrived to convey two exactly opposite impressions. I could never solve the mystery. On the lofty box sat the most perfect model of a coachman I had seen up to that time. Beside the open door in the shallow, loftily hung body of the carriage stood an equally perfect footman. I was soon to get used to that marvelous English ability at specializing men—a system by which a man intended for a certain career is arrested in every other kind of growth, except only that which tends to make him more perfect for his purpose. Observing an English coachman, or valet or butler or what not, you say, “Here is a remarkably clever man.” Yet you soon find out that he is practically imbecile in every other respect but his specialty.

We entered the carriage, I sitting opposite the ladies—and most uncomfortable I was; for the carriage was designed to show off its occupants, and to look well in it they had to know precisely how to sit, which I did not. No one noticed me, however. There was too much pleasure to be got out of observing Edna and Margot,

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

who were looking like duchesses out of a storybook. I knew they were delightfully conscious of the sensation they were making, yet they talked and laughed as if they were alone in their own sitting room—a trick which is part of that “education” of which you have heard something, and will hear still more. The conversation seemed easy. In fact, it was only animated. It was a fair specimen of that whole mode of life. You have seen the wonderful peaches that come to New York from South Africa early in the winter—have delighted in their exquisite perfection of color and form. But have you ever tasted them? I would as lief eat sawdust; I would rather eat it—for, of sawdust I should expect nothing.

“That young man is the Marquis of Crossley,” said my wife.

I liked to hear her pronounce a title in private. It gave you the sense of something that tasted fine—made you envy her the sensation she was getting. “Who is he?” said I.

Margot laughed naïvely—an entrancing display of white teeth and rose-lined mouth. “Marquis of Crossley, papa,” she said. “That’s all—and quite enough it is.”

“I don’t know much about the big men in England,” said I. “He looked rather young to amount to very much.”

“He’s as old as you are,” said Edna, a flash of ill-humor appearing and vanishing.

I was astonished. “I thought him a boy,” said I.

“He’s one of the greatest nobles in England—one

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of the greatest in Europe," said Edna—and I saw Margot's eyes sparkling.

"He seemed a nice fellow," said I amiably. "How you have grown, Margot!"

"Hasn't she, though!" cried my wife. "Aren't you proud of her?"

"I'm proud of you both," said I. "You make me feel old and dingy."

"You've been working too hard, poor dear," said Edna tenderly. "If you only would stay over here and learn the art of leisure."

"I'm afraid I'd be dismally bored," said I.

I had heard much about the art of loafing as practiced by Europeans, and I had not been attracted by what I had heard. It was inconceivable to me that intelligent grown men could pass their time at things about equal to marbles and tops. But I suppose I am abnormal, as they allege. Many men seem to look on mental effort of any kind as toilsome, and seize the first opportunity to return to the mindless frolickings of the beasts of the field. To me mental effort is a keen pleasure. And I must add I can't help thinking it is to everybody who has real brains.

The conversation would have died in distressing agony had it not been for the indomitable pluck of my wife. She struggled desperately—perhaps may even have deceived herself into thinking that she was glad to see me and that the carriage was the scene of a happy reunion. But I, who had a thorough training in quickly sizing up situations, saw the truth—that I was a rank outsider, to both wife and daughter; that they were

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

strangers to me. I began to debate what was the shortest time I could decently stop in London.

"We are to be presented at Court next week," said Edna.

Margot's eyes were again sparkling. It was the sort of look the novelists put on the sweet young girl's face when she sees her lover coming.

"Yes—next week—next Thursday," said Edna. "And so another of the little duchess's dreams is coming true."

"Is it exciting?" said I to Margot. Somehow reference to the "little duchess" irritated me.

"Rather!" exclaimed Margot, fairly glowing with ecstasy. "You put on the most wonderful dress, and you drive in a long, long line of wonderful carriages, with all the women in wonderful dresses. And you go into the palace through lines and lines of gorgeous liveries and uniforms—and you wait in a huge grand room for an hour or so, frightened to death—and then you walk into the next room and make the courtesy you have been practicing for weeks—and you pass on."

"Good!" cried I. "What then?"

"Why you go home, half dead from the nervous shock. Oh, it's wonderful!"

It seemed to me—for I was becoming somewhat critical, as is the habit in moods of irritation—it seemed to me that Margot's elaborate and costly education might have included the acquiring of a more extensive vocabulary. That word wonderful was beginning to get on my nerves. Still, this was hypercriticism. A lovely woman does not need a vocabulary,



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

or anything else but a lovely dress and plenty of money to provide background. "Yes—it must be—wonderful," said I.

"We've been working at it for weeks, mamma and I," continued she. "I'm sure we shall do well. I can hardly wait. Just fancy! I'm to meet the *king* and the *queen*!"

I saw that Edna was in the same ecstatic trance. I leaned back and tried to distract myself with the novelty of London houses and crowds. It may be you understand the mingling of pity, contempt, anger, and amusement that filled my breast. If you do not understand, explanation would merely weary you. I was no longer proud of my beautiful family; I wished to get away from them, to forget them. Edna and Margot chatted on and on about the king and queen, about the various titled people they knew or hoped to know, about the thrills of aristocratic society. I tried not to listen. After a while I said, with I hope not unsuccessful attempt at amiability:

"I'm sorry I shan't be here to witness your triumph."

Across Edna's face swept a flash of vivid—I had almost said vicious—annoyance. "You're not going before the drawing-room at Buckingham Palace!" cried she.

"I'll have to," said I.

"But you can't!" protested Margot, tears of vexation in her eyes. "Everyone will think it's dreadfully queer."

"Don't fret about that, my dear," replied I lightly.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I know how it is over here. So long as you've got the cash they'll never ask a question. We Americans mean money to them—and that's all."

"Oh, papa!" cried Margot.

"Don't put such ideas into the child's head, Godfrey," said my wife, restraining herself in a most lady-like manner.

"She knows," said I. "So do you. Money is everything with aristocracies everywhere. They must live luxuriously without work. That can't be done without money—lots of money. So aristocrats seriously think of nothing else, whatever they may talk."

"You'll have a better opinion of them when you know them," said Edna, once more serene and sweetly friendly.

"I don't think badly of them," I replied. "I admire their cleverness. But you mustn't ask me to respect them. They hardly expect it. They don't respect themselves. If they did, they'd not be stealing, but working."

Margot listened with lowered eyes. I saw that she was ashamed of and for me. Edna concealed her feelings better. She forced an amiable smile. "I don't know much about these things," she said politely. "But, Godfrey, you mustn't desert us, at least not until after the drawing-room. I've told our ambassador you're to be here, and he has gone to no end of trouble to arrange for you."

"Howard?" said I. "That pup! I despise him. He's a rotten old snob. They tell me his toadyism turns the stomach of even the English. He's a disgrace to

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

our country. But I suppose he's little if any worse than most of our ambassadors over here. They've all bought their jobs to gratify their own and their wives' taste for shoe polish."

This speech so depressed the ladies that their last remnant of vivacity fled, not to return. You are sympathizing with them, gentle reader, and they are welcome to your sympathy. We drove in silence the rest of the way to the hotel in Piccadilly, where they were installed in pompous luxury and had made equally luxurious provision for me. When I was alone with my valet I reasoned myself out of the grouchy mood into which the evidences of my family's fresh access of folly had thrown me. To quarrel with them, to be irritated against them, was about as unreasonable as attacking a black man for not being white. I had long since realized, as the result of much experience and reflection, that character is no more to be changed than any other inborn quality. My wife had been born an aristocrat, and had brought into the world an aristocratic daughter. She was to be blamed neither for the one thing nor for the other. And it ill became my pretensions to superior intellect to gird at her and at Margot. The thing for me to do was to let them alone—keep away.

At dinner, which was served in our apartment, I took a different tone with them, and they met me more than half way. So cheered was my lovely daughter that after dinner she perched on the arm of my chair and ventured to bring up the dangerous subject. Said she:

"You're not going to be mean to me and run away, are you, papa?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Looking at Edna, but addressing Margot, I replied: "Your mother will tell you that it's best. We three never can agree in our ideas of things. I'm an irritation. I spoil your pleasure."

"No—no, indeed!" cried the girl. "I've been looking forward to your coming. I've been telling everybody how handsome and superior you are. And I want them to see for themselves."

Most pleasant to hear from such rare prettiness, and most sincerely spoken.

"So many of the American men in society over here are common," proceeded she, "and even those who aren't so very common somehow seem so. They are down on their knees before titles, and they act—like servants. Even Mr. Howard— He oughtn't to show his feelings so plainly. Of course we all feel impressed and honored by being taken up by real titled people of old families, but it's such bad form to show, and it interferes with getting on. When I'm talking to Lord Crossley about that drawing-room, I act as if it were nothing."

"I see you are being well educated," said I, laughing.

"Oh, yes. Mamma and I have worked. We've not had an idle moment."

"I believe you," said I.

"You *will* stay, papa—won't you?"

I shook my head. But it was no longer the positive gesture. My besetting sin, my good nature, had possession of me. Remember, it was after dinner, and my beautiful daughter was caressing my cheek and was

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

pleading in a voice whose modulations had been cultivated by the best masters in Paris.

"But I don't want people to think I was deceiving them about my papa."

"I'm willing to be exhibited to a select few in the next two or three days," I conceded. "They will tell the others."

And with that they had to be content. In the faint hope of inducing me to change my mind, Edna—the devoid of the sense of humor—took me to a tailor's and had me shown pictures and models of the court costume I would wear. But I remained firm. A sense of humor would have warned her that a person of my sort would have an aversion to liveries of every kind, to any costume that stamps a man as one of a class. I am perhaps foolishly jealous of my own individuality. But I cannot help it. A king in his robes, a general in his uniform—except in battle where it's as necessary and useful as night shirt or pajamas in bed—any sort of livery seems pitiful and contemptible to me. I will wear the distinguishing dress of the human race and the male sex, but further than that classification I refuse to move. Also, what business had I, citizen of a democracy whose chief idea is the barbarism and silliness of aristocracy—what business had I going to see a king and a queen? I should have felt that I was aiding them in the triumph of dragging democracy at their chariot wheels. No, I would not go to levees and drawing-rooms. You may say I showed myself an absurd extremist. Well, perhaps so. But, as it seems to be necessary to go to one extreme or the other, I

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

prefer the extreme of exaggerated and vainglorious self-respect.

"The king and queen are no doubt nice people," said I to Margot. "But if I meet them, it must be on terms of equality—and for some purpose less inane than exchanging a few set phrases."

Edna and Margot seemed to feel that they had, on the whole, a presentable specimen of male relative to exhibit; for they made the most of the four days I gave them. Through Hilda Armitage, now Lady Blankenship, and much freshened up by the more congenial atmosphere, they had got in with the set that is the least easy of access to Americans—though, of course, it is not actually difficult for any American with plenty of money and a willingness to spend and good guidance in how to spend. And I must admit I enjoyed myself in those four days. The women were, for the most part, rather slow, though I recall two who had real intelligence, and I don't think there was a single one quite so devoid of knowledge of important subjects as our boasted "bright" American women. The men were distinctly attractive. They had information, they had breadth—the thing the upper-class men of America often lack. Also, they were entirely free from that ill-at-easeness about their own and their neighbor's position in society which makes the American upper classes tiresome and ridiculous.

It amused me to observe the Americans in this environment. Both our women and our men seemed uneasy, small, pinched. You could distinguish the Ameri-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

can man instantly by his pinched, tight expression of an upper servant out for a holiday. I could feel the same thing in our women, but I doubt not their looks and dress and vivacity concealed it from the Englishmen. Anyhow, women are used to being nothing in themselves, to taking rank and form from their surroundings. While with us it seems to be true that the women are wholly responsible for social position with all its nonsense, the deeper truth is that they owe everything to the possessions of their fathers or husbands. Without that backing they would be nothing. Everything must ultimately rest upon a substantiality. In themselves, unsupported, the women's swollen pretensions would vanish into thin air.

Lord Crossley was to have dined with us my first evening in London, but was prevented by suddenly arising business in the country. Next day he came to lunch, and I at once saw that he was after Margot hammer and tongs. I discovered it not by the way he treated her, but by his attitude toward her mother and me. He seemed a thoroughly satisfactory young man in every way, and I especially liked his frankness and simplicity. Edna had devoted a large part of a long sight-seeing tour with me to an account of his grandeur in the British aristocracy. Having had experience at that time of the American brand of aristocracy only, I was ignorant of the European kinds that have the aristocratic instinct in the most acute form—the ingrowing form. I know now that our own sort, unpleasant and unsightly though it is, cannot compare in malignance, in littleness and meanness of soul with

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the European sort. Just as the noisy blowhard is a modest fellow and harmless, and on acquaintance lovable in comparison with the silent, brooding egotist, just so is the American aristocrat in comparison with the European. An American aristocrat has been known to forget himself and be human. I recall no instance of that sort in an European born and bred to the notion that his flesh and blood are of a subtler material than the flesh and blood of most men. However, as I was saying, at the time of my first visit to Europe I knew nothing of these matters, and Lord Crossley seemed to me a simple, ingenuous young man, most attractively boyish for his years.

"That chap wants to marry Margot," said I to Edna when we were alone later in the afternoon.

"I think so," said she. "Several young men wish to marry her. But she is in no hurry. She's not nineteen yet, and she would like a duke."

"To be sure," said I. "But she may not be able to love a duke."

"I never heard of a girl who wouldn't love a duke if she got the chance," said Edna. "There are only five—English dukes, I mean—who are eligible. Margot has met three of them—and one, the Duke of Brestwell, has taken quite a fancy to her." Carelessly, but with nervous anxiety underneath, "You wouldn't have any objection?"

"I? Why?"

"Oh—you are so—so peculiar in some ways."

"Anyone who pleases Margot will suit me," said I.

"We were afraid you'd be prejudiced against



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

titles. You've been with that eccentric Mr. Armitage so much—and you always have been against the sort of things Margot and I like.”

“I've no objection to titles,” said I. “In fact, I think Margot will be happier if she marries a title. You've educated her so well that she'll never see the man or think of him.”

“How little you know her!” cried Edna, pathetically. “And how unjust to me your prejudices make you. I've brought her up to be all refinement—all sentiment—all heart. She looks only at the highest and best.”

“At the duke,” said I.

“Certainly at the duke,” said she. “Her tastes are for the life where a woman can show her beauty of soul to the best advantage and can do the most good. There is no career for a woman in America. But over here a woman married into the aristocracy has a real career.”

“At what?” said I.

“As a recognized social leader. As a leader in charities and all sorts of good movements.”

“Ah, I see,” said I—and there I stopped, for I had learned not to argue with my wife—or with anyone else, male or female—when the subject is sheer twaddle. “Yes, I think Margot would do well to marry over here and to have a dazzling career. I'm sure she'd never get tired of this—pardon me—treadmill. I observe that it's better organized than the imitation one we have over in ‘the States.’”

“I should say!” cried Edna. “You've no idea

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

how cheap and common the best you have in New York is beside the social life here. I've been here only a year, but already there have been the greatest changes in me. Don't you notice?"

"I do," said I. "And I can honestly say you have changed for the better. You've learned to cover it up."

She looked inquiringly at me, but I did not care to explain what the "it" was that she had learned to cover. A slight flush appeared in her cheeks, and I knew intuitively that she thought I was alluding to her humble origin. I did not disabuse her mind of this impression. She would have been angry had I explained that I meant her social ambitions which I thought vulgar and she thought refined. Both she and Margot, except in occasional unguarded moments in privacy, had indeed vastly improved in manners. They had learned the trick of the aristocrats they associated with—the trick of affecting simplicity and equality and quietly confident ease. There was a notable difference, and altogether in their favor, between their manners and the manners of the former Mrs. Armitage and other American women. Whatever might justly be said in the way of criticism of my wife, it assuredly could not be said that she was lacking in agility at "catching on." Armitage once said to me, "Your wife is a marvelous woman. I never saw or heard of her making a break." This tribute can be appreciated only when you recall whence she sprung—and how much of her origin remained with her—necessarily—through all her climbings and soarings.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You prefer it over here?" said I—we were still driving.

"If it weren't for you, I'd never go back," said she.

"For me?" said I. "Oh, don't bother about me."

"But I do," replied she sweetly. And her hand covertly stole into mine for a moment. "Sometimes I get so homesick, Godfrey, that's it all I can do to fight off the impulse to take the first steamer."

I tried to look as a man should on hearing such pleasant and praiseworthy sentiments from the wife of his bosom.

"You've acted cold and—and reserved with me," she went on. "I wanted to come to you last night. But I hadn't the courage. You are such a mixture of tenderness and—and aloofness. You have the power to make even me feel like a stranger."

"I'm sure I don't mean to be that way," said I, thoroughly uncomfortable.

"Margot was speaking of it," proceeded Edna. "She said—poor affectionate child—that she hardly dared put her arms round you and kiss you. You oughtn't to repulse the child that way, Godfrey. She has a tender, loving heart. And she adores you. She and I talk of you a long time every day. I'd insist on it as a matter of duty—for I'd not let your child forget you. But I don't need to insist. She refers everything to you, and whenever she's unusually happy, she always says: 'If papa could only be enjoying this with us!'"

I saw that she had worked herself up into a state of excitement. My good sense told me that there was

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

no genuineness in either her affection or Margot's. But I had no doubt they both thought themselves genuine. And that was quite enough to give me, the easy-going American slob of a husband and father, an acute attack of guilty conscience. The upshot was——

But you who have an impressionable heart and a keen sense of your own shortcomings can guess what it was. Edna and I resumed the relations of affectionate husband and wife for the rest of my—brief—stop in London. I remained several days longer than I had intended—stayed on because I did not wish to hurt her feelings. And I bought her and Margot all sorts of jewelry and gew-gaws, largely increased her personal fortune, did not utter a word that would ruffle either of them. And I left them convinced that I was going only because business not to be neglected compelled.

They say that the hypocrite wife is a common occurrence. I wonder if the hypocrite husband is rare. I wonder if there are not more instances than this one of the husband and the wife playing a cross game of hypocrisy, with each fancying the other deceived?

So busy was I with my own laborings to deceive my wife as to the true state of my feelings toward her that not until I was halfway across the Atlantic did I happen to think the obvious thought. You, gentle reader, have not thought it. But perhaps some more intelligent species of reader has. In mid-Atlantic, I suddenly thought: "Why she—she and Margot—were playing a game—the same game. For what purpose?"

It was not many months before I found out.

## VII

THAT summer Armitage was spending the week ends out on Long Island at the country place of his sister, Mrs. Kirkwood. He kept his yacht in the tiny harbor there and made short cruises in the Sound and up the New England coast. Naturally I often went with him. Those parties usually amused me. He knew a dozen interesting people—working people—such as Boris Raphael, the painter, and his wife, the architect, the Horace Armstrongs who had been divorced and remarried, a novelist named Beechman who wrote about the woods and lived in the wilderness in the Southwest most of the year, Susan Lenox the actress—several others of the same kind. Then there was his sister—Mary Kirkwood.

For a reason which will presently appear I have not before spoken of Mrs. Kirkwood, though I had known her longer than I had known Armitage. Her husband had been treasurer of the road when I was an under Vice President. He speculated in the road's funds and it so happened that, when he was about to be caught, I was the only man who could save him from exposure. Instead of asking me directly, he sent his wife to me. I can see her now as she was that day—pale, haggard, but with that perfect composure which deceives the average human being into thinking, "Here

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

is a person without nerves." She told me the whole story in the manner of one relating a matter in which he has a sympathetic but remote interest. She made not the smallest attempt to work upon my feelings, to move me to pity. "And," she ended, "if you will help him cover up the shortage, it will be made good and he will resign. I shall see to it that he does not take another position of trust."

"Why didn't he come to me, himself?" said I. "Why did he send you?"

She looked at me—a steady gaze from a pair of melancholy gray eyes. "I cannot answer that," said she.

"I beg your pardon," stammered I; for I guessed the answer to my question even as I was asking it. I knew the man—an arrogant coward, with the vanity to lure him into doing preposterous things and wilting weakness the instant trouble began to gather. "You wish me to save him?" I said, still confused and not knowing how to meet the situation.

"I am asking rather for myself," replied she. "I married him against my father's wishes and warning. I have not loved him since the second month of our marriage. If he should be exposed, I think the disgrace would kill me." Her lip curled in self-scorn. "A queer kind of pride, isn't it?" she said. "To be able to live through the real shame, and to shrink only from the false."

"I'll do it," said I, with a sudden complete change of intention. "That is, if you promise me he will resign and not try to get a similar position elsewhere."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I promise," said she, rising, to show that she was taking not a moment more of my time than was unavoidable. "And I thank you"—and that was all.

I kept my part of the agreement; she kept hers. In about two years she divorced him because he was flagrantly untrue to her. He married the woman and supported her and himself on the allowance Mary Kirkwood made him as soon as her father's death let her into her share of the property. When I saw her again—one night at dinner at her brother's house, before his wife divorced him—we met as if we were entire strangers. Neither of us made the remotest allusion to that first meeting.

Going down to her house with Armitage often and being with her on the yacht for days together, I became fairly well acquainted with her, although she maintained the reserve which she did not increase for a stranger or drop even with her brother. You felt as if her personality were a large and interesting house, with room after room worth seeing, most attractive—but that no one ever was admitted beyond the drawing-room, not for a glimpse.

Don't picture her as of the somber sort of person. A real tragedy can befall only a person with a highly sensitive nature. Such persons always have sense of proportion and sense of humor. They do not exaggerate themselves; they see the amusing side of the antics of the human animal. So they do not pull long faces and swathe themselves in yards of *crêpe* and try to create an impression of dark and gloomy sorrow. They do not find woe a luxury; they know it in its

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

grim horror. They strive to get the joy out of life. So, looking at Mary Kirkwood, you would never have suspected a secret of sadness, a blighted life. As her reserve did not come from self-consciousness—either the self-consciousness of haughtiness or that of shyness and greenness—you did not even suspect reserve until you had known her long and had tried in vain to get as well acquainted with her as you thought you were at first. I imagine that in our talk in my office about her husband I got further into the secret of her than anyone else ever had.

One detail I shall put by itself, so important does it seem to me. She had a keen sense of humor. It was not merely passive, merely appreciation, as the sense of humor is apt to be in women—where it exists at all. It was also active; she said droll and even witty things. When her sense of humor was aroused, her eyes were bewitching.

What did she look like? The women all wish to know this; for, being fond of the evanescent triumphs over the male which beauty of face or form gives, and as a rule having experience only of those petty victories, they fancy that looks are the important factor, the all-important factor. In fact, the real conquests of women are not won by looks. Beauty, or, rather, physical charm of some kind, is the lure that draws the desired male within range. If after pausing a while he finds nothing more, he is off again.

Perhaps, probably, my experience with Edna has made me more indifferent to looks than the average man who has never realized his longing to possess a phys-



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ically beautiful woman. However that may be, Mary Kirkwood certainly had no cause to complain that Nature had not been generous to her in the matter of looks. She was tall, she was slender. She had a delicate oval face, a skin that was clear and smooth and dark with the much prized olive tints in it. She had a beautiful long neck, a great quantity of almost black hair. Her nose suggested pride, her mouth mockery, her eyes sincerity. She was the kind of woman who exercises a powerful physical fascination over men, and at the same time makes them afraid to show their feelings. Women like that tantalize with visions of what they could and would give the man they loved, but make each man feel that it would be idle for him to hope. In character she was very different from her cynical, mocking brother—was, I imagine, more like her father. Mentally the resemblance between the brother and sister was strong—but she took pains to conceal how much she knew, where he found his chief pleasure in “showing off.” I feel I have fallen pitifully short of doing her justice in this description. But who can put into words such a subtlety as charm? She had it—for men. Women did not like her—nor she them. I state this without fear of prejudicing either women or men against her. Why is it, by the way, that to say a man does not like men and is not liked by them is to damn him utterly, while to say that a woman neither likes nor is liked by her own sex is rather to speak in her favor? You cry indignantly, “Not true!” gentle reader. But—do *you* know what is true and what not true? And, if you did, would you confess it, even to yourself?

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

You are proceeding to revenge yourself upon me. You are saying, "*Now* we know *why* he was indifferent to his beautiful wife and to his lovely daughter!—*Now* we understand that fit of guilty conscience in London!"

Do you know? Perhaps. I am not sure. I am not conscious of any especial interest in Mary Kirkwood until after I came back from London. I had seen her but a few times. We had never talked so long as five consecutive minutes, and then we had talked commonplaces. Not the commonplaces of fashionable people, but the commonplaces of intelligent people. There's an enormous difference.

The first time my memory records her with the vividness of moving pictures is, of course, at that meeting in my office. The next time is a few days after my return from London. I had been surfeited both in London and on the steamer with the inane amateurs at life, the shallow elegant dabblers in it, interesting themselves only in coaching, bridge, and similar pastimes worthy an asylum for the feeble-minded. I went down to the Kirkwood place with Armitage. As his sister was not in the house we set out for a walk through the grounds to find her. At the outer edge of the gardens a workman told us that if we would follow a path through the swampy woods we could not miss her.

The path was the roughest kind of a trail. Our journey was beset with swarms of insects, most of them mosquitoes in savage humor. It lay along the course of a sluggish narrow stream that looked malarious and undoubtedly was. "Landscape gardening is one of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Mary's fads," explained her brother. "She has been planning to tackle this swamp for several years. Now she is at it."

In the depths of the morass we came upon her. She was in man's clothes—laboring man's clothes. Her face and neck were protected by veils, her hands by gloves. She was toiling away with a gang of men at clearing the ground where the drains were to center in an artificial lake. Armitage called several times before she heard. Then she dropped her ax and came forward to meet us. There was certainly nothing of what is usually regarded as feminine allure about her. Yet never had I seen a woman more fascinating. There undoubtedly was charm in her face and in her strong, slender figure. But I believe the real charm of charms for me was the spectacle of a woman usefully employed. A woman actually doing something. A woman!

After the greeting she said: "The only way I can get the men to work in this pesthole is by working with them." She smiled merrily. "One doesn't look so well as in a fresh tennis suit wielding a racket. But I can't bear doing things that have no results."

"My father insisted on bringing us up in the commonest way and with the commonest tastes," said Armitage, "and Mary has remained even less the lady than I am the gentleman."

As the mosquitoes were tearing us to pieces Mrs. Kirkwood ordered us back to the house. Before we were out of sight she was leading on her gang and wielding the ax again. At dinner she appeared in all the radiance and grace of the beautiful woman with fondness for

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

and taste in dress. She explained to me her plan—how swamp and sluggish, rotting brook were to be transformed into a wooded park with a swift, clear stream and a succession of cascades. I may add, she carried out the plan, and the results were even beyond what my imagination pictured as she talked.

This first view of her life in the country set me to observing her closely—perhaps more closely and from a different standpoint than a man usually observes a woman. In all she did I saw the same rare and fascinating imagination—the only kind of imagination worth while. Of all its stupidities and follies none so completely convicts the human race of shallowness and bad taste as its notions of what is romantic and idealistic. The more elegant the human animal flatters itself it is, the poorer are its ideals—that is, the further removed from the practical and the useful. So, you rarely find a woman with so much true poetry, true romance, true imagination as to keep house well. But Mary Kirkwood kept house as a truly great artist paints a picture, as a truly great composer creates an opera. In all her house there was not a trace of the crude, costly luxury that rivals the squalor and bareness of poverty in repulsiveness to people of sense and taste. But what comfort! What splendid cooking, what perfection of service. The chairs and sofas, the beds, the linen, the hundred and one small but important devices for facilitating the material side of life, and so putting mind and spirit in the mood for their best— But I despair of making you realize. I should have to catalogue, describe, contrast through page after page. And when I

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

had finished, those who understand what the phrase art of living means would have read only what they already know, while those who do not understand that phrase would be convulsed with the cackling laughter that is the tribute of mush-brain to intellect.

Observing Mary Kirkwood I discovered a great truth about the woman question: the cruelest indictment of the intellect of woman is the crude, archaic, futile, and unimaginative way in which is carried on the part of life that is woman's peculiar work—or, rather, is messed, muddled, slopped, and neglected. No doubt this is not their fault. But it soon will be if they don't bestir themselves. Already there are American men not a few who apologize for having married as a folly of their green and silly youth.

So, gentle reader, though my enthusiasm tempts me to describe Mary Kirkwood's housekeeping in detail, I shall spare you. You would not read. You would not understand if you did.

The first time she and I approached the confidential was on an August evening when we were alone on the upper deck of the yacht. The others were in the cabin playing bridge. We had been sitting there perhaps an hour when she rose.

"Don't go," said I.

"I thought you wished to be alone," said she.

"Why did you think that?"

"Your way of answering me. You've been almost curt."

"I'm sorry. I can't promise to talk if you stay. But I hate to be left alone with my thoughts."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I understand," said she. And she seated herself beside the rail, and with my assistance lighted a cigarette.

There was a moon somewhere above the awning which gave us a roof. By the dim, uncertain light I could make out her features. It seemed to me she was staying as much on her own account as on mine—because she, too, wished not to be alone with her thoughts. I had not in a long time seen her in a frankly serious mood.

"How much better off a man is than a woman," said I. "A man has his career to think about, while a woman usually has only herself."

"Only herself," echoed she absently. "And if one is able to think, oneself is an unsatisfactory subject."

"Extremely," said I. "Faults, follies, failures."

For a time I watched the faintly glowing end of her cigarette and the slim fingers that held it gracefully. Then she said:

"Do you believe in a future life?"

"Does anyone feel *sure* of any life but this?"

"Then this is one's only chance to get what one wants—what's worth while."

"What *is* worth while?" I inquired, feeling the charm of her quiet, sweet voice issuing upon the magical stillness. "What *is* worth while?"

She laughed softly. "What one wants."

"And what do *you* want?"

She drew her white scarf closer about her bare shoulders, smiled queerly out over the lazily rippling waters. "Love and children," she said. "I'm a normal woman."

That amused me. "Normal? Why, you're unique

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

—eccentric. Most women want money—and yet more money—and yet more money—for more and more and always more show.”

“You must want the same thing,” retorted she. “You’re too sensible not to know you can’t possibly do any good to others with money. So you must want it for your own selfish purposes. It’s every bit as much for show when you have it tucked away in large masses for people to gape at as if you were throwing it round as the women do. . . . If anything, your passion is cruder than theirs.”

“I think I make money,” said I, “for the same reasons that a hen lays eggs or a cow gives milk—because I can’t help it; because I can’t do anything else and must do something.”

“Did you ever try to do anything else?”

“No,” I admitted. Then I added, “I never had the chance.”

“True,” she said reflectively. “A hen can’t give milk and a cow can’t lay eggs.”

“For some time,” I went on, “I’ve been trying to find something else to do. Something interesting. No, not exactly that either. I must find some way of reviving my interest in life. The things I am doing would be interesting enough if I could be interested in anything at all. But I’m not.”

She nodded slowly. “I’m in the same state,” said she. “I’ve about decided what to do.”

“Yes?” said I encouragingly.

“Marry again,” replied she.

I laughed outright. “That’s very unoriginal,” said

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I. "It puts you in with the rest of the women. Marrying is all *they* can think of doing."

"But you don't quite understand," said she. "I want children. I am thinking of selecting some trustworthy man with good physical and mental qualities. I have had experience. I ought to be able to judge—and not being in love with him I shall not be so likely to make a mistake. I shall marry, and the children will give me love and occupation. You may laugh, but I tell you the only occupation worthy of a man or a woman is bringing up children. All the rest—for men as well as for women—is—is like a hen laying eggs to rot in the weeds. . . . Bringing up children to develop us, to give us a chance to make them an improvement on ourselves. That's the best."

As the full meaning of what she had said unfolded I was filled with astonishment. How clear and simple—how true. Why had I not seen this long ago—why had it been necessary to have it pointed out by another? "I believe—yes, I'm sure—that's what I've been groping for," I said to her.

"I thought you'd understand," said she, and most flattering was her tone of pleasure at my obvious admiration.

Thus our friendship was born.

I could not but envy her freedom to seek to satisfy the longing I thus discovered in my own heart. So strongly did the mood for confidence possess me that only my long and hard training in self-restraint held me from the disloyalty of speaking my thoughts. I said:



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"It's dismal to grow old with no ties in the oncoming generation. The sense of the utter futility of life would weigh more and more heavily. I'm surprised that you've realized it so young."

"A woman realizes it earlier than a man," she reminded me. "For a woman has no career to interfere and prevent her seeing the truth."

A woman! Rather, a rare occasional Mary Kirkwood. Most women never looked beyond the gratification of the crudest, easiest vanities and appetites. "Yes, you are right," I continued. "You ought to marry—as soon as you can. The man isn't important, except in the ways you spoke of. So far as man and woman love is concerned, that quickly passes—where it ever exists at all. But the bond of father, mother, and children is enduring—at least, I'm sure *you* would make it so."

We sat lost in thought for some time—I reflecting moodily upon my own baffled and now seemingly hopeless longing, she probably busy with the ideas suggested in her next speech.

"The main trouble is money," said she. "Except for that my husband would have been all right. When we first met he did not know my family had wealth. He thought I belonged to another and poor branch. And I think he cared for me, and would have been the man I sought but for the money. It roused a dormant side of his nature, and everything went to pieces."

"Then, marry a rich man," I suggested.

She shook her head. "I don't know a single rich man—except *possibly* my brother—who isn't obsessed about money. The rich have a craving to be richer that's

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

worse than the desire of the poor to be rich. . . . I don't know what to do. I couldn't bring up children in the atmosphere of wealth and caste and show—the sort of atmosphere a man or woman crazy about money insists on creating. My father was right. He was a really wise man. I owe to him every good instinct and good idea I have.”

“But you must have seen some man who promised well. I think you can trust to your judgment. You mustn't defeat your one chance for happiness by over-caution.”

Again she was silent for several minutes. Then she said, with a queer laugh and an embarrassed movement: “I have seen such a man—lately. I like him. I think I could like him more than a little. I've an idea he might care for me if I'd let him. But—I don't know.”

I saw that she longed to confide, but wished to be questioned. “Here on the yacht?” said I.

She nodded.

“Beechman?”

She laughed shyly yet with amusement.

“That was an easy guess,” said I. “He's the only man of us free to marry.”

“What do you think of him?”

“The very man I'd say,” replied I. “He's good to look at—clever, healthy, and honest. He isn't money mad. He could make quite a splurge with what he has, yet he doesn't. He is a serious man—does not let them tempt him into fashionable society or any other kind.”

“What are the objections?” said she. “My father

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

trained us to look for the rotten spots, as he called them. He said one ought to hunt them out and examine them carefully. Then if, in spite of them, the thing still looked good, why there was a chance of its being worth taking."

"That's precisely my way of proceeding in business," said I. "It's a pity it isn't used in every part of life—from marketing up to choosing a friend or a husband."

"Well, what are the 'rotten spots' in Mr. Beechman?"

"I haven't looked for them," said I. "No doubt they're there, but as they're not obvious they may be unimportant."

"Can't you think of *any*?"

She was laughing, and so was I. Poor Beechman, down in the cabin absorbed in bridge, how amazed he'd have been if he could have heard! In my mind's eye I was looking him over—a tall, fair man with good smooth-shaven features.

"He's getting bald rather rapidly for a man of thirty or thereabouts," said I.

"I don't like baldness," said she. "But I can endure it."

"He is distinctly vain of his looks and his strength. But he has cause to be."

"All men are physically vain," said she. "And they can't help it, because it is the hereditary quality of the male from fishes and reptiles up."

"He's inclined to be opinionated, and his point of view is narrow."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I think I might hope to educate him out of that," said she. "I can be tactful."

"It's certainly not a serious objection."

"Any other spots?"

"He has a certain—a certain—lack of vigor. It's a thing I've observed in all professional men, except those of the first rank, those who are really men of action."

She nodded. "I was waiting for that," said she. "It's the thing that has made me hesitate." She laughed outright. "What a conceited speech! But I'm exposing myself fully to you."

"Why not?" said I.

"I am picking him to pieces as if I thought myself perfection. As a matter of fact, I know he'd fly from me if he saw me as I am." She reflected, laughed quietly. "But he never would know me as I am. An unconventional woman—if she's sensible—only shows enough of her variation from the pattern to make herself interesting—never enough to be alarming."

"You are unconventional?"

"You didn't suspect it?"

"No. You smoke cigarettes—but that has ceased to be unconventional."

"I rather thought you had a favorable opinion of my intelligence," said she.

"So I have," said I. "To be perfectly frank, you seemed to me to have as good a mind as your brother."

"That is flattering," said she, immensely pleased, and with reason. "Well, if you thought so favorably

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of my intelligence, how could you believe me conventional?"

"I see," said I. "No one who thinks can be conventional."

"Conventionality," said she, "was invented to save some people the trouble of thinking and to prevent others from being outrageous through trying to think when they've nothing to think with."

"That is worth remembering and repeating," laughed I. "Personally, I'm deeply grateful for conventionality. You see, I came up from the bottom, and I find it satisfactory to be able to refer to the rules in all the things I knew nothing about."

"My brother says the most remarkable thing about you—and your wife— Do you mind my telling you?"

"Go on," said I.

"He says most people who come up are alternately hopeless barbarians and hopelessly conventional, but that you took the right course. You learned to be conventional—learned the rules—before you ventured to try to make personal variations in them."

"I'm slow to risk variations," said I. "Most of the efforts in that direction are—eccentric. And I detest eccentricity as much as I like originality."

"If Mr. Beechman were only a little less conventional!" sighed she. "I'm afraid he'd be rather—" She hesitated.

"Tiresome?" I ventured to suggest.

"Tiresome," she assented. "But—there would be the children. Do you think he'd try to interfere with me there?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You'll never know that until you've married him," said I.

"It's a pity he has an occupation that would keep him round the house most of the time," said she. "That's a trial to a woman. She's always being interrupted when she wishes to be free."

"You mustn't expect too much," said I. "I think the children will be *your* children."

She did not reply in words. But a sudden strengthening of her expression made me feel that I was getting a glimpse of her father.

We talked no more of Beechman or of any personalities related to this story. When the bridge party broke up and a supper was served on deck, she and Beechman sat together. And I gathered from the sounds coming from their direction that he was making progress. My spirits gradually oozed away and I sat glumly pretending to listen while Mrs. Raphael talked to me. Usually she interested me because she talked what she knew and knew things worth while. But that night I heard scarcely a word she said. When the party, one by one, began to go below, Mrs. Kirkwood joined me and found an opportunity to say, aside:

"Won't you talk with Mr. Beechman—and tell me your honest opinion? You know I can't afford to make another mistake. And I'm in earnest."

I stood silent, smoking and staring out toward the dim Connecticut shore.

"It wouldn't be unfair to him," she urged. "You're not especially his friend. I can't ask anyone else, and I believe in your judgment."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"If I advised you, I'd be taking a heavy responsibility," said I.

"I'm not that kind—you know I'm not," replied she. "I don't ask advice, to have some one to blame if things go wrong. Of course, if there's a reason why you can't very well help me— Maybe you already know something against him?—something you've no right to tell?"

"Nothing," said I, emphatically. "And I don't believe there is anything against him." Then, on an impulse of fairness and to wipe out the suspicion of Beechman I had unwittingly created, I said: "Really, there's no reason why I shouldn't size him up and give you my opinion. I'll do my best."

She thanked me with a fine lighting up of the eyes. And the warm friendly pressure of her hand lingered after she had long been below and was no doubt asleep.

What was my reason for hesitating? You have guessed it, but you think I do not intend to admit. You are deceived there. I admit frankly. I felt unable to advise her because I found that I was in love with her, myself. Yes, I was in love, and for the first time in my life. The latest time of falling in love is always the first. As we become older and more experienced, better acquainted with the world, with ourselves, with what we want and do not want—in a word, as we *grow*, the meaning of love grows. And each time we love, we see, as we look back over the previous times, that what we thought was love was in fact simply educational.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

So, when I say I had never loved until I loved Mary Kirkwood, I am speaking a truth which is worth thinking about. I had reached the age, the stage of physical and mental development, at which a man's capacities are at their largest—at which I could give love and could appreciate love that was given to me. And I, who could not ask or hope love from her, gave her all the love I had to give. Gave because I could not help giving. Who, seeing the best, can help wanting it?

But for my promise to her I should have left the yacht early the following morning. As it was I stayed on, with my mind made up to keep my word. Did I stay because of my promise? Did I stay because I loved her? I do not know. Who can fathom the real motive in such a situation as that? I can only say that I sought Beechman's society and did my best to take his measure. It had been so long my habit to judge men without regard to my personal feeling about them that, perhaps in spite of myself, I saw this man as he was, not as I should have liked him to be. I found that I had underestimated him. I had been prejudiced by his taking himself too seriously—a form of vanity which I happen particularly to detest. Also his sense of humor was different from mine—a fact that had misled me into thinking he had no sense of humor. I had thought—shall I say hoped?—that I would find him a man she could respect but could not love. I was forced to abandon this idea. So far as a man can judge another for a woman, he could succeed with almost any heart-free woman. I wondered that Mary Kirkwood should be uncertain about him. I might have drawn



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

comfort from her having done so, had I not known how she dreaded making a second mistake.

That day and the next, when I was not with him, she was. I shan't attempt to tell my emotions. That sort of thing seems absurd to all the world but the one who is suffering. Besides, the fact that I was a married man would alienate the sympathies of all respectable readers. Not that I am yearning for sympathy. Those who have read thus far may have possibly gathered that I am not one of those who live on sympathy and wither and die without it. The only sympathy human beings seem able to give one another, I have discovered, is a species of self-complacent pity; and while it may not be exactly a stone, it is certainly a most inferior quality of bread.

The third morning I sought her out. She made a picture of strong, slim young womanhood to cause the heart—at least, my heart—to ache, as she leaned against the rail in her blue-trimmed white linen dress showing her lovely throat. Said I, avoiding her eyes: “I’m off for the shore, and I wish to report before leaving.”

“Ashore!” she cried. “Why, you were to have gone on to Bar Harbor and back again.”

“Business—always business.”

“I’m disappointed,” said she, and I saw with a furtive glance that her face had quite lost its brightness.

“I’m glad of that, at least,” said I with a successful enough attempt at lightness; for, as I have never been the sort of man in whom women expect to find sentimentalism, signs of embarrassment or other agitation

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

would be attributed to any other source before the heart.

"I've lost interest in the trip," she declared.

I forced a smile. "Beechman isn't going."

"Oh, that's different," said she, with a certain frank impatience. "You're the one person I can really talk to. . . . Can't you stay?"

I did not let my face betray me. I waited before speaking until I was sure of my voice. "Impossible," I said, perhaps rather curtly—for, mind you, I wished to deal honestly with her, and was not trying to hint my love while pretending to hide it. I know there is a notion that love cannot be controlled. But the kind of love that can't be controlled is a selfish, greedy appetite and not love at all. When the man doesn't control his love the woman may be sure he is thinking of himself only, of her merely as a possible means of pleasure—is thinking of her as the hungry hunter thinks of the fine fat rabbit. Said I:

"Now for my report on Beechman."

But she would not let me escape. "Why are you short with me?" she asked. "Have I offended you?"

"No, indeed," said I. "You've been everything that's kind and friendly."

"The very idea of losing your friendship frightens me," she went on. "I've a feeling for you—a feeling of—of intimacy"—she flushed rosily—"that I have for no one else in the world. Oh, I don't expect you to return it. No doubt I seem insignificant to you. Almost anyone would want your friendship. You are sure you aren't leaving because you are bored?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Absolutely sure. If I could explain my reason for going you would see that I must. But I can't explain. So you'll be glad to hear that I find Beechman even more of a man than I thought."

She looked at me apologetically. "You'll think me foolish, but since I've begun to try to like him better I've been—almost—not liking him."

I am sure I beamed with delight. For, there are limits—very narrow ones—to unselfishness in the most considerate love. And I am not able to pose as more than feebly unselfish. "That isn't fair to him," I said, with more enthusiasm in my words than in my tone. "I've been judging him as carefully as I know how, and I must in honesty say he is a rare man. You'll not find many like him."

"Don't tell me he's worthy," she cried, "or I shall loathe him."

"And he cares for you," I said.

"Did he tell you so?"

"I think he would have if I had encouraged him. . . . I liked the way he spoke of you, and"—I hesitated, could not hold back the words—"and I am not easy to please there." Those words were certainly far from confession, were the mildest form of indiscretion. Still, so determined was I to be square, and so guilty did I feel, that they sounded like a contemptible attempt stealthily to make love to her.

"Thank you," she said gently. And her suddenly swimming eyes and tender voice reminded me how alone she was and how bitter her experience had been and how she deserved happiness.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I felt ashamed of myself. "I hope you will be happy," I said, perhaps rather huskily. "Anyone who tried to prevent it would deserve to be killed."

She looked at me with such a steady, penetrating gaze that I feared I had betrayed myself. In fact, I knew I had. I glanced at my watch, put out my hand. "I hate to go," I said, in the tone of one man to another. "But I must." And as we shook hands, I repeated, "I know you will be happy."

She laughed nervously; she, too, had become ill at ease. "You make me feel engaged," she said with an attempt at mockery.

As the launch touched the shore I looked back. She was leaning on the rail, Beechman beside her. He was talking, but I felt sure she was not listening. As I looked she waved her hand. I lifted my hat and hurried away. And I learned the meaning of that word desolation.

Do not think, because I have not raved, talked of the moon and stars, poetized about my soul states, that therefore I did not love her. The banquet of life spread so richly for me seemed a ghastly mockery. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? I had lost my soul. I had discovered how I might have been happy, and at the same time I had discovered that it could never be—never. And always before me she stood in her radiant youth—intelligent, so capable, splendidly sincere—the woman I loved, the woman I felt I could have made love me.

There was my temptation—the feeling, the convic-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

tion that I could win her love. She had confessed to a friendship for me different from any she had for anyone else in the world. If I were willing to take advantage of her trust, of her liking, of her longing for love and of my knowledge of it—if I were to let her see how utterly I loved her—I could surely win her. There were times when I said to myself: “You—even as you are—can make her happier than anyone else could. She would prefer what you can give her to what she will get from Beechman. Your love gives you the right to make her happy. You are letting foolish conventional notions blind you to what is really right. If you had acted in business in that fashion, you would not have got far. Yet in the supreme crisis of your life you let yourself be frightened off by a boggy of conventional morality.”

Perhaps I was giving myself sound advice there. I do not know. I only know that I put the temptation behind me and went to work. The sentimental readers will not forgive me. So be it. I am a plain man, rather old-fashioned—prim, I believe it is called—in my ideas, not at all the ladies’ man. And I did not want to harm her. I loved her.

I went to work. The sort of people who are ever on the lookout for some excuse for going to pieces, and the world is well sprinkled with them, eagerly seize on disappointment in love as precisely what they were seeking. At the risk of being thought cold and hard, I will say that it is extremely fortunate for Joan that she escaped the Darby who goes smash for disappointed love of her. If Joan had yielded to him, Darby

would simply have been put to the trouble of finding another pretext for throwing up his job and taking to drink. I confess it did not occur to me to give up and fall to boozing and brooding. I should not have dared do that; for, you see, I was really in love—not with myself, but with Mary Kirkwood. I went to work. I filled my days and my evenings with business engagements that compelled both my time and my thought. I took on an extra secretary. I started to build a railway. I laid out an addition to the manufacturing city I had founded. I organized a farm for teaching city slum boys to be farmers. I engaged in several entirely new mining and manufacturing enterprises. The result was that when I went to bed, I slept; and when they awakened me in the morning my brain was at work before my head was well off the pillow. And still—You can distract your mind from the aching tooth, but it aches on.

All this time I was receiving weekly letters from Edna and Margot—long and loving letters. I read them, and you may possibly imagine I was filled with shame and remorse. Not at all. My wife and my daughter had rather exaggerated my vanity. Only vanity could gull a husband and father in my position into fancying himself the object of such luxuriant affection as those letters professed. If you have lies to tell, take my advice and don't *write* them. I can't explain the mystery, but a lie which, spoken and heard, passes out and passes in as smoothly as a greased shuttle in its greased groove, becomes a glaring falsehood when set down in black and white. The only effect of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

those letters upon me was to make my sick heart the sadder with the realization of what I had missed in losing Mary Kirkwood.

And I kept wondering what it was that Edna and Margot were slathering me for.

In September I got the key to the mystery. The necessity of floating some bonds took me abroad again. I found my family ensconced in beautiful luxury in an apartment in Paris. You drove out the Champs Elysées. Not far from the President's palace you drove in at great doors—not gates, but doors—in a plain, unpretentious-looking house wall. You were in a superb garden of whose existence you had no hint from the street. Magnificent bronze inner doors—powdered and velveted lackeys—a majestic stairway leading to lofty and gorgeous corridors and salons. Really my wife, with the aid of those clever European professors of the aristocratic art, had educated herself amazingly. On every side there were evidences of her good taste in furniture, in tapestries, in wall coverings, in pictures. It was not the taste of a home maker, but it was unquestionably good taste. It was not the sort of taste I liked, but not to admire it would have been to lack the sense of harmony in line and color. And let me add in justice to her, it was her own taste. There is no mistaking the difference between the luxury that is merely bought and the luxury that is created.

I submitted with what grace I could muster to the exuberant hypocrisies of that greeting. But I got to

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

business with all speed. "In the note I found in London you said you had a surprise for me," I said to Edna. "What is it?"

"How impatient you are," laughed she. "Just like a child."

Whether because the fashions of the day happened to be peculiarly becoming or because she had actually improved, she now had the loveliness more exquisite than I had ever seen in woman. No doubt her piquant face had charm for most people; for me it had none whatever. I knew too well what lay beneath—or, rather, what was not there, for like most human beings her defects of character were not so much the presence of the vices as the lack of the virtues.

"I've been waiting for that surprise several months," said I. "Your letters and Margot's showed that some shock was coming."

"Shock? No, indeed!" And she and Margot laughed gayly. "It isn't altogether a surprise," she went on. "Can't you guess?"

I looked at Margot. "Ah!" I said. "Margot is engaged."

Margot ran across the room and kissed me. "Oh, I'm so happy, papa!" she cried.

"Is it the duke?" I asked.

She made a wry face. "He was horrid!" she said. "I couldn't *endure* him."

"So you had to fall back on the marquis?"

Neither of the women liked this way of putting the matter. It suggested that I knew the painful truth of the failure of the ducal campaign. But they were not



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to be put out of humor. "You liked him yourself, papa," said Margot.

I was abstractedly thinking how I had no sense of her being my daughter or of Edna being my wife. You would say that after all we three had been through together, from Passaic up, it would be a sheer impossibility for there ever to be a sense of strangeness between us. But there is no limit to the power of the human soul to cut itself off; intimacy is hard to maintain, isolation—alas—is the natural state. I looked on them as strangers; I could feel that, in spite of their clever, resolute forcing, in spite of the hypocrisy of love for me which each doubtless maintained at all times with the other, still they could scarcely hide their feeling that I was a strange man come in from the street.

"Yes, I liked Crossley," said I. "I think he'll make you a good husband."

"He is *mad* about her!" said Edna. "There was a while this summer when he thought he had lost her, and he all but went out of his mind."

To look at her was to believe it; for, a lovelier girl was never displayed in all her physical perfection by a more discriminating mother.

"When is the wedding to be?" said I.

There was a brief, surcharged silence—no more than a pause. Then Edna said indifferently, "As soon as the settlements are arranged."

"Oh—is he settling something on her?" said I, with pretended innocence. "I'm glad of that. There's been too much of the other sort of thing."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Margot came to the rescue with a charming laugh. "Poor Hugh!" she said. "He hasn't anything but mortgages."

"Um—I see," said I glumly—and I observed intense anxiety behind the smiles in those two pairs of beautiful eyes. "How much have we got to pay for him?"

Edna looked reproachfully at me. "Margot," said she, "you'd better go tell them to serve lunch in fifteen minutes."

"Nonsense," said I cheerfully. "Let her stay. What's the use of this hypocrisy? She knows he cares no more about her than she cares about him—that it's simply a matter of buying and selling. If she doesn't know it, if she's letting her vanity bamboozle her——"

"Godfrey—please!" implored Edna. "Don't smirch the child's romance. She and Hugh love each other. If she were poor, he'd marry her just the same."

"Has he offered to go ahead, regardless of settlements?" I asked.

"Of course not, papa," flashed Margot. "Things aren't done that way over here."

"Oh, yes, they are," replied I. "Romantic love matches occur every day. Even royalty throws up its rights, to marry a chorus girl. But when there's a fat American goose to pluck and eat, why, they pluck and eat it. I'm the goose, my dear—not you."

"You don't understand," murmured Margot.

"I wish I didn't," said I. "And I wish you didn't have to understand. If possible I want to arrange

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

matters with him so that he'll always treat you decently."

"But, Godfrey," cried Edna in a panic, "you can't talk money to *him*."

"Why not?" said I. "He's *thinking* money. Why shouldn't he talk it?"

"He knows nothing about those things, papa——"  
I laughed.

"You'll ruin everything!" cried my wife. "You'll make us the laughingstock of Europe!"

"We Americans of the rich class are that already," replied I.

Edna must have given her daughter some secret signal, for she abruptly and hastily left the room, closing the door behind her. I shrugged my shoulders, settled back on the exquisitely upholstered and carved sofa on which I had seated myself. Looking round I said, "This is a beautiful room. You've certainly arranged a fitting background for yourself and Margot."

But she was not listening. She was watching her fingers slowly twist and untwist the delicate little lace handkerchief. At last she said: "Godfrey, I've never asked a favor of you. I've given my whole life to advancing your interests—to making our child a perfect lady—and to placing her in a dazzling position."

"Yes," said I. "You have worked hard—and you've made your tricks."

"I've played my hand well—as you have yours," said she, accepting my rather unrefined figure with good grace. "I began to make Margot's career before she was born. The first time I saw her little face, I

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

murmured to myself, 'Little Duchess.' Now, you understand why I brought her up so carefully."

"Oh," said I, looking at her with new interest. "That was it?" I who knew what a futile, purposeless, easily discouraged breed the human race is could not but admire this woman. If her intelligence had only been equal to her will; what might she not have accomplished!

"I have never lost sight of it for a moment," said she. "In the early days—for a time—when we were seemingly so hopelessly obscure, and I was too ignorant to learn which way to turn—for a while I was discouraged. But I never gave up—never! And step by step I've trained her for the grand position as a leader of European society she was one day to occupy—for, I knew that if she led Europe she would be leader at home, too. Over there they're merely a feeble, crude echo of Europe."

"Socially," said I.

"That's all we're talking about," replied she. "That's all there is worth talking about. What else have you been piling up money for? . . . What else?"

I could think of no reply. I was silent. What else, indeed?

"I kept her away from other children," Edna went on. "After she could talk I never trusted her to nurses until we could afford fashionable servants. I got her the right sort of governesses—so that she should speak French, Italian, and German, and should have a well-bred English accent for her own language. I even trained her in the children's stories she read—had her

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

read only the fairy tales and the other stories that would fill her mind with ideas of nobility and titles and the high things of life."

"The high things of life," said I.

She made an impressive gesture—she looked like a beautiful young empress. "Let's not cant," said she. "Those *are* the high things of life. Ask any person you meet in America—young or old, high or low—ask him which he'd rather be—a prince, duke, marquis, or a saint, scientist, statesman. What would he answer?"

I laughed. "That he'd rather be a millionaire," said I.

"A millionaire with a title—with established social position at the very top—that couldn't be taken away. That's the truth, Godfrey."

"I'll not contradict you," said I.

"And," she went on, "I've brought up our daughter so that she could realize the highest ambition within our reach. Haven't I brought her up well?"

"Perfectly, for the purpose," said I.

"When we came over here, I examined the ground carefully. I was at first inclined to one of the big Continental titles. They are much older, much more high sounding than the English titles—and so far as birth goes they mean something, while the English titles mean really nothing at all. The English aristocracy isn't an aristocracy of birth."

"That's, no doubt, the reason why it still has some say in affairs," said I.

"Its talk about birth is almost entirely sham," pro-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ceeded she, not interested in my irrelevant comment. "But I found that it was the most substantial aristocracy, the only one that was respected everywhere, just as the English money circulates everywhere. And it's the only one that makes much of an impression at home. We are so ignorant that we think England is all that it pretends to be—the powerful part of Europe. Of course, it isn't, but—no matter. I decided for an English title."

"And Margot?"

"I have brought her up to respect my judgment," said Edna.

"I wonder what will become of her," said I, reflectively, "when she hasn't you at her elbow to tell her what to do. . . . But why a marquis? Why not a duke?"

She smiled, blushed a little. "The only duke we could have got—and he was a nice young fellow—but he was in love with an English girl of wealth—and he wanted too much to change to an American. Is that frank enough to suit you?"

"If you'd only keep to that key," said I.

"He wanted double the American dowry that he was willing to take with an English girl."

"His being in love with another girl might have made it unpleasant for Margot," I suggested.

"That wouldn't have amounted to anything," replied she. "Over here the right sort of people bring up their children as I brought up Margot—to give their hearts where their hands should go. They are not shallow and selfish. They think of the family dig-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

nity and honor before they think of their personal feelings."

"That's interesting—and new—at least to me," said I.

"You have been judging these things without knowing, Godfrey," said she. "You have attacked me for narrowness, when in fact you were the narrow one."

"Yes? What next?" said I.

"I found that the Massingfords—that's the family name of the Marquis of Crossley—I found they ranked higher as a family than any of the ducal families except one. Of course I don't include the royal dukes."

"Of course not," said I gravely.

"I might possibly have got one of the royal dukes—if not in England, then here on the Continent. But I decided— You see, Godfrey, I looked into everything."

"You certainly have been thorough," said I. "I should have said it was impossible in so short a time."

"But it wasn't difficult. All the Americans over here are well informed about these things."

"I can readily believe it," said I. "But why did you turn down the poor royal dukes?"

"Because the other women would have made it dreadfully uncomfortable for Margot. They'd have hated her for taking precedence over them by such a long distance. Then, too—the dowry. I was afraid you couldn't afford the dowry—or wouldn't think the title worth the money. Indeed, I didn't think so, myself."

"A royal duke comes high?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"The least dowry would be seventy-five million francs."

"Fifteen million dollars!" I exclaimed. "Whew!"

"Mrs. Sinkers tried to get one for her daughter for ten millions—all she could scrape together. They agreed to a morganatic marriage for that, but not a full marriage. So, she and poor Martha gave it up. Martha's heart is broken. The duke made love to her so wonderfully. I can't imagine what Mrs. Sinkers was about, to allow such a thing before the affair was settled. Poor Martha was so excited that she would have accepted the morganatic marriage—she ranking merely as the duke's head mistress. But while he was willing to take other mistresses for nothing, and even to pay them, he wouldn't take *her* for less than fifty million francs."

"Poor Martha!" said I.

"I was too wise to trifle with royal dukes," pursued Edna, so interested in her own narrative and so eager to show how sagacious she had been that she forgot her pose and her doubts as to my sympathies. "I weighed the advantages and disadvantages of about a dozen eligible men. Only three stood the test, and it finally narrowed down to Crossley. Margot was *so* happy when I told her. She wanted to love him—and now she *is* loving him."

A long pause while Edna calmed down to earth from her European soarings, and while I, too, returned to the normal from an excursion in the opposite direction. "How much does he want?" said I. "Let's get to bed rock."



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"He loves her so that he is willing, so I hear— Of course, nothing has been said— You will not believe how refined and——"

"How much?" interrupted I.

Edna winced at my rudeness, then again presented an unruffled front of happy loving serenity. "Enough to pay off the mortgages and to provide them with a suitable income."

"How much?" I persisted, laughing.

She looked tenderly remonstrant. "I don't know, Godfrey——"

"You know *about* how much. What's the figure—the price of this marked down marquis?"

"I should say the whole thing would not cost more than three or four million dollars."

"Three—or four." I laughed aloud. "Not much difference there. Now which is it—three or four?"

"Perhaps nearer four. Margot must have a *good* income."

"To be sure," said I.

"The whole object would be defeated if she hadn't the means——"

"The money," I suggested. "Why use these evasive words? We're talking a plain subject. Let's use its language."

"The money, then," acquiesced she, resolutely good-humored. "If she hadn't the money to make a proper appearance."

"Naturally, to lead in society you must lead in spending money. . . . Well—it can't be done."

She paled, half started from her chair, sank back

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

again. There was a long silence. Then she said, "You have never been cruel, Godfrey. You won't be cruel now. You won't destroy my life work. You won't shatter Margot's happiness."

"The whole thing is—is nauseating to me," said I.

Her short, pretty upper lip quivered. Her eyes filled. "If you didn't approve, dear, why didn't you stop me long ago? Why did you let me go on until there was no turning back?"

I was silent. There seemed to be no answer to that.

"Did you do it purposely, Godfrey?" said she, with melancholy eyes upon me. "Did you lure us on, so that you could crush us at one stroke?"

I was silent.

"I can't believe that of you. I won't believe it until you compel me to."

"As I understand it," said I, "you propose that I hand over to this young man four million——"

"Only about half of it, Godfrey," cried she, reviving. "The other half would be Margot's—for her own income."

"Then that I hand over to this amiable, insignificant young foreigner two million dollars to induce him to consent to the degradation of marrying my daughter—to have him going about, saying in effect, 'It is true, she is only one of those low Americans, but don't forget that I got two million dollars for stooping.' Is that the proposition?"

"You know it isn't!" cried she. "He doesn't feel that he is degrading himself. He feels proud of winning her—the most beautiful, the best mannered girl in Lon-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

don. But it'd be simply impossible for them to marry without the money. *I* shouldn't want it. They would be wretched. You talk like a sentimental schoolboy, Godfrey. How could two refined, sensitive people such as Hugh and Margot, used to every luxury, used to being foremost in society—how could they be happy without the means——”

“The money,” *I* corrected blandly.

“Without the money needed to maintain their position as marquis and marchioness of Crossley?”

*I* nodded assent.

“He has only about five thousand—twenty-five thousand of our money—a year. That is ridiculous for a marquis. He has to keep all his houses closed and run as economically as possible. Even then they cost him nearly seventy-five thousand dollars a year to maintain.”

“And he has only twenty-five thousand!”

“*I* meant twenty-five thousand over and above. He has that to live on. And, poor fellow, he is dropping every year deeper and deeper into debt. So much is expected of a marquis.”

“But not honesty, apparently,” said *I*.

“You mustn't judge these people by our commercial standards,” she gently rebuked.

“*I* forgot,” said *I* penitently.

“And the poor fellow does love Margot so!”

“Um,” said *I*. “Have you ever happened to hear of a Miss Townley—Jupey Townley?”

A flash of annoyance flitted over Edna's lovely, delicate countenance.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I see you have," said I. "You were, indeed, thorough. Permit me to compliment you, my dear."

"I am glad Hugh hasn't been a saint."

"Isn't," said I.

"That's all in the past," declared she.

"I saw them in a box at a London music hall night before last," said I. "They were— They had been drinking."

But Edna was not daunted. "You are a man of the world, Godfrey. Don't pretend to be narrow."

"When a man loves a woman——"

"Love is very different from that sort of thing, and you know it."

"Has Margot heard——"

"Godfrey!" cried Edna, in horror. "Do you think I would permit *my* daughter—*our* daughter—to know such things! Why, her mind is as pure——"

I could not restrain a gesture of disgust. "You women!" I cried, rising. "Pure! Pure—God in Heaven, pure!"

Her look of dazed astonishment, obviously sincere, helped me to get back my composure. I sat down again. "I beg your pardon," I said. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Even if you men have no purity yourselves, you ought to believe in it in women," said she, with an injured air.

"Yes, indeed," I agreed heartily. "I congratulate you on being able to make such generous allowances for masculine frailty."

"You are sarcastic," said she coldly.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"No matter. It certainly does not damage the title—perhaps adds to its luster."

"It's hereditary in their family to be wild up to marriage, and then to settle down and serve the state in some distinguished position."

"Oh—in that case—" said I ironically.

"Margot and her husband and her children will have your money some day," pursued she. "Why not give it to her now, when it will get her happiness?"

That impressed me. "I have not said I would not consent to this marriage," I reminded her. "As a matter of fact, I'm in favor of it. I can see no future for Margot in America——"

"No, indeed," cried Edna eagerly. "She simply couldn't marry over there. She'd be wretched."

"But I feel it is my duty— Rather late in the day for me to talk about duty toward my daughter, after neglecting it all these years. Still, I ought to see to it that she has the best possible chance for a smooth married life. It's only common prudence to take all precautions—isn't it?"

"All *sensible* precautions," said she.

"You know how many of these foreign 'alliances,' as they're called, have turned out badly."

"They get a good many divorces in the states," she suggested smilingly. "One to every twelve marriages, I read the other day."

I admitted that she had made an effective retort. "The truth is," said I, "American women aren't brought up for domestic life. So, whether they marry at home or abroad they have trouble."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"Men resent their independence," said Edna.

"It may be so," said I. Of what use to point out to her that the trouble lay in the women's demanding to be supported and refusing to do anything to earn their support? All I said was: "I suspect a good many husbands think the marriage contract too one-sided—binding only them and not their wives. But the trouble with the 'alliances' can't be that."

"It's because Europeans look on the wife as a kind of head servant. But Hugh isn't that sort."

"We'll know more as to that when we hear what Margot says after she's been married a few years," said I. "The point to settle now is how to bind him to good behavior so far as it can be done in advance. He may be deeply in love with Margot. He may stay in love with her. But in the circumstances it's wise to assume that he wants only her money and that, if he gets it, he'll treat her badly."

My wife's silence was encouraging.

"If he had plenty of money he might even goad her into releasing him—and might marry again."

My wife was obviously impressed. "Yes—that has been done," said she. "Of course, if Margot should have an heir right away. But——"

She looked at me as if trying to decide whether she could trust me with a confidence. She evidently decided in my favor, for she went on to say:

"On the other hand—Margot is a peculiar girl. No—many women have the same peculiarity. They can't be trusted with power over their husbands. If she had all the money in her own name and he were

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

dependent on her— Godfrey, I'm sure there'd be trouble."

Once more she was astonishing me with her clear judgment in matters as to which I should have thought her hopelessly prejudiced. "But *I* can be trusted," said I. "The plan I had in mind was to take over the mortgages and guarantee a sufficient income."

She shook her head. "He won't consent," said she. "His solicitors will insist on better terms than that."

"Now you see why I want to talk to him directly. I don't purpose to be hampered by that old trick of the principal hidden behind a go-between."

"There's no other way," said Edna. "They're too clever to yield that."

"He needs money badly."

"But he won't marry unless he's actually to get it," replied she. "Almost every American who has married a daughter over here has tried to make a business bargain—at least, a bargain not altogether one-sided. Not one of them has succeeded. These Europeans have been handling the dowry and settlement question too many centuries."

"I see," said I affably. "If we want what they've got, we have to take it on their terms."

It was most satisfactory, talking with her now that she consented to speak and listen to good sense. I was at once in a more amiable frame of mind, although I knew she had descended from her high horse only because she was shrewd enough to see it was the one way to get me to do as she wished.

"I will hide behind a go-between myself," said I.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"Any English lawyer would simply play into the hands of the other side. At least, so Hilda was telling me."

"Is she happy?"

"Very."

"When's her husband coming back?"

"Not for a year or so, I believe. Lord Blankenship cares more for big game and for exploring than for anything else."

"An ideal marriage," said I. "She brought him the money he wanted. He brought her the title she wanted. And they don't annoy each other. He devotes himself to sport, she to society. These aristocratic people, with their simple, vulgar wants that are so easily gratified—how they are to be envied!"

Edna was observing me furtively, uneasily. I pretended not to notice. I went on: "Now, if they wanted the difficult things—things like love and companionship and congeniality—they might be wretched. When a child cries for a stick of candy or a tinsel-covered rattle—for money or social position—why, it's easily pacified. But if it cries for the moon and the stars—" I laughed softly, enjoying her wonder as much as my own fancies.

After a while she said, with some constraint: "You see a great deal of Armitage?"

"We console each other," said I, with mild raillery.

"Have you been going out much?"

"I'm very busy."

"In one of your letters— Those rare little notes of yours! You are cruelly neglectful, Godfrey— In one



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of them you spoke of a week end or so on Armitage's yacht. You and he don't go off alone?"

"Oh, no. Some literary and artistic people usually are aboard."

"I didn't know you cared for that sort."

"They're interesting enough."

"I suppose they're friends of Mrs. Kirkwood's," pursued Edna. "She's like her brother—affects to despise fashionable society. Their pretenses always amused me."

"They are sincere people," said I. "They don't pretend. That's why I like them."

"I notice that Armitage belongs to every fashionable club in New York—and to some over here," said Edna with a smile that was as shrewd as her observation. "Also, that he manages to find time to appear at the most exclusive parties during the season."

I had observed this same peculiarity. While I refused to draw from it the inference she drew—and was undeniably justified in drawing—I had been tempted to do so. It irritated me to see her finger upon the weak spot in Armitage's profession of freedom from snobbishness.

"And Mary Kirkwood," pursued Edna, "she's the same sort of fakir. Only, being a woman, she does it more deceptively than he."

"She goes nowhere," said I.

"But she revels in the fact that she *could* go anywhere. So, she fooled you—did she?" Edna laughed merrily at my ill-concealed discomfiture. "But then you know so little about women."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I confess I've never seen in her the least sign of snobbishness or of interest in fashionable foolishness," said I, with what I flatter myself was a fair attempt at the impartial air.

"That in itself ought to have opened your eyes," said Edna. "Whenever you see anyone, dear, with no sign of a weakness that everybody in the world has, you may be sure you are seeing a fraud."

"Because *you* have a weakness, dear," said I—as pleasant and as acid as she, "you must not imagine it is universal."

"But *you* have that weakness, too."

"Really?"

"Did you or did you not join the fashionable clubs Armitage put you up at?"

I had to laugh at myself.

"Are you or are you not proud of the fact that your best friend, Armitage, is a fashionable person? Would you be as proud of him if he were only welcome in middle-class houses?"

"I'm ashamed to say there's something in that," said I. "Not much, but something."

"Yet you believed Mary Kirkwood!" ended Edna.

"I thought little about it," said I. "And I still believe that she is sincere—that she has no snobbishness in her."

"You like her?"

"So far as I know her—yes." My answer was an attempt to meet and parry a suspicion I felt in Edna's mind. And it was fairly successful; fairly—for no one ever yet completely dislodged a suspicion. We cannot

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

see into each other's minds. We know, from what is going on in our own minds, that the human mind is capable of any vagary. Once we have applied this general principle to a specific person, once we have become definitely aware that there are in that person's mind things of which we have no knowledge—from that time forth suspicion of them is in us, and is ready to grow, to flourish.

I had no difficulty in shifting to the subject of the marriage. "I'll cable for my lawyer," said I. "If anyone can beat this game, Fred Norman can."

"Yes—send for him," said Edna. "He is canny—and a man of *our* world."

"I'm going back to London to-night—" I went on.

"To-night!" she exclaimed. Her eyes filled with tears. "Godfrey—is this treating us right?"

I looked at her intently. "Don't fake with me," said I quietly. "It isn't necessary."

"What *do* you mean?" cried she.

"I mean, I understand perfectly that you care nothing about me, except as the source of the money you need in amusing yourself. As you see in my manner, I am not wildly agitated by that fact. So far as I'm concerned, there's no reason why we should make each other uncomfortable."

"What *is* the matter with you, Godfrey?" she said, with large widening eyes gazing at me. "You have changed entirely."

"As you have," said I, admiring her shrewdness, and afraid of it. "You've been educating. So have I."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Mine has been slower than yours and along different lines. But it, too, has been thorough."

She was not satisfied, though I'm confident my tone and manner betrayed nothing. Said she: "Some bad woman has been poisoning you against Margot and me."

"As you please," said I, too wary to be drawn into that discussion. I realized I had said entirely too much. Relying upon her intense vanity, her profound belief in her power over me, I had gone too far. "My business takes me to London to-night. I'll probably be there until Norman arrives. Then we'll come over."

"Don't you want us in London with you?" said Edna.

"You are comfortably settled here," replied I. "Why disturb yourselves?"

She knew how to read me. She saw I was not in a dangerous mood, as she had begun to fear. She said: "We *did* intend to stay in Paris a month or six weeks. We have a charming circle of friends among the old families here. I wish you'd stop on, Godfrey. The people are attractive, and the social life is most interesting."

"Not to me," said I. "You forget I'm a Hooligan. Besides, you don't need me. There's your advantage through being young and lovely and rich. You can get plenty of men to escort you about. It's only the old and ugly married woman who really need their husbands. Well—I'll be ready when you are forced to fall back on me. Nothing like having in reserve a faithful Dobbin."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

She looked hurt. "How *can* you joke about sacred things," she reproached.

I laughed her seriousness aside. "Yes, I'll be waiting, ready to be your companion, the confidant of your rheumatism and gout, when all the others have fled. Meanwhile, my dear, I'll have my frisk."

"Godfrey!"

It amused me to see how bitter to her was the taste of the medicine she had been forcing upon me so self-complacently. It amused me to watch the confusion into which these new and unsuspected aspects of myself was throwing her.

Said I: "I'm glad you're as generous toward me as I've been toward you. That's why we've avoided the Armitage sort of smash-up."

When I left Paris that night I'll engage she was thinking about me as she had never thought in her whole self-centered, American-female life.

## VIII

My cable to Norman was answered the next day but one by a note from him, stopping in the same hotel. I shall not detail the negotiations that followed—the long and stormy scenes between him and Dawkins, solicitor to the Marquis of Crossley. It is sufficient to say that Norman had the novel sensation of being beaten on every point. Not outwitted, for he had wit enough and to spare for any contest of cunning; but beaten by the centuries-old precedents and customs and requirements in matters of dower and settlement. The mercenary marriage is an ancient habit of the human race; in fact, the scientists have proved that it began with marriage itself, that there was no marriage in the civilized sense until there was property to marry for. Perhaps the mercenary marriage is not so recent in America as our idyllists declare. Do we not read that the father of his country married solely for money an almost feeble-minded woman whom everybody knew he did not love? And, inasmuch as marriage is first of all a business—the business of providing for the material needs and wants of two and their children—may it not barely be possible that the unqualifiedly sentimental view of marriage can be—perhaps has been—overdone? In America, where the marriage for sentiment prevails to an extent unknown anywhere else in the world—is not

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the institution of marriage there in its most uneasy state? And may not that be the reason?

What a world of twaddle it is! If men and women could only learn to build their ideals on the firm foundation—the only firm foundation—of the practical instead of upon the quicksand of lies and pretenses, wouldn't the tower climb less shakily, if more slowly, toward the stars?

You may be sure there was nothing of the stars in those talks between Norman and Dawkins—or in my talks with Norman—or in Crossley's talks with Dawkins. Crossley had had me looked up—had discovered as much about my finances as it is possible to discover about the private business of an American. He had got the usual exaggerated estimate of my wealth, and he was resolved that he would not be cheated of a single dollar he might wring from me. From my standpoint it was obvious that he and Margot must have plenty of money or they could not be happy. All I desired was to prevent him from feeling financially free—and therefore under the aristocratic code, morally free—to show and to act, after marriage, the contempt I knew he felt for all things and persons American—except the dollars, which could be exchanged into sovereigns. I fought hard, but he stood fast. Either Margot must lose him or I must give him about what he asked—a fortune in his own right for him. If I choose I could dower her; but as to dowering him he would not permit the question of alternative to be raised.

“All right,” said I at last to Norman. “Give them their minimum.”

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

He was astounded, was furious—and as he is not the ordinary lick-spittle lawyer but a man of arrogant independence, he did not hesitate to let me see that his anger—and scorn—were for myself. “Do you mean that?” he said.

“Yes,” replied I carelessly—as if I were now indifferent about the whole business. “My girl wants his title. And why let a question of money come between her and happiness?”

“I can’t refrain from saying, Loring, that I’d not have believed this of you.”

“She’s not fit to live in America,” said I. “Her mother hasn’t educated her for it. American mothers don’t educate their daughters nowadays to be wives of American men. Honestly, do you know an American man able to do for himself who would be foolish enough to marry that sort of girl?”

His silence was assent.

“You see. I’ve got to buy her a husband—that is, a title—over here. This offering seems as good as there is in the market—at the price. So—why not?”

“That’s one view of it,” said he coldly.

I laid my hand on his shoulder. “Come now—be sensible,” said I. “What else can I do?”

“It would be an impertinence for me to say,” replied he.

“I can guess,” said I. “You needn’t trouble yourself to say it. You evidently don’t know the circumstances. And I may add that so long as I’ve got to buy Margot a title I might as well buy her a good one.”



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

He eyed me sharply. But I did not take him into my confidence—nor shall I confide in you at present, gentle reader. I did not even let him see that I was holding back anything. I went on with good-humored raillery:

“I’m doing better than Hanley or Vanderveld or Pattison or any of the others who’ve dealt in these markets. For a marquis Crossley is selling cheap. He’s far from penniless, you know. It’s simply that he wants more money. Why, really, old man, it’s what’s called a love match. They always call it a love match when the nobleman isn’t absolutely on his uppers.”

“You are certainly a philosopher, Loring,” said Norman, anxious, I saw, to finish and drop the affair.

“And I became one in the usual way—necessity,” said I. “I’m as eager to have this thing dispatched as you are. I want to get out to sea, where perhaps the stench of aristocracy will blow out of my nostrils, and stay out of them till I reach the other shore. Then I’ll get it again. It blows down the bay to meet the incoming ships.”

“Yes, we’re pretty bad,” admitted Norman. “Not so bad as we used to be, but pretty bad.” He laughed. “They accuse us of loving money. Why, we are mere beginners at it. We haven’t learned how to idle or how to spend money except in crude, tiresome ways. And to love money deeply you must know how to idle and how to spend. Money’s *the* passion with these people. How they do need it!”

Neither shall I linger over the details of the engagement and the wedding. For all that was important

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

about either I refer you to the newspapers of London and New York. They gave everything that makes a snob's eyes glisten and a snob's mouth water. My wife has somewhere—she knows exactly where—a scrapbook, and my daughter has another of the same kind. Those scrapbooks are strongly bound and the pages are of the heaviest time- and wear-resisting paper. In them are pasted columns on columns of lists of titles, of descriptions of jewels and dresses, of enumerations of wedding gifts. Margot received things costing small fortunes from people she barely knew well enough to invite. They gave in the hope—the good hope—of gaining the valuable favor of the Marchioness of Crossley, a great lady by reason of her title, a greater lady by reason of the ancientness of the Massingford family, and at the top and summit of greatness by reason of her wealth.

That last item, by the way, was vastly overestimated. Everyone assumed that Crossley had sold much more dearly. No one but those intimately concerned dreamed what a bargain I had got.

You may be picturing a sordid affair, redolent of the stench of commercialism. If you are, gentle reader, you are showing yourself unworthy of your own soulfulness, unworthy of the elegant society into which I have introduced you. I have been giving simply the plain facts—a mere skeleton upon which you, versed in society columns and society novels, and skilled in the art of hiding ugly truths under pretty lies, may readily drape the flesh and the garments of sentimentality and snobbishness. You will then have the truth as it ap-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

peared to the world—a handsome, manly groom, every inch of him the patrician; a wondrous lovely, innocent, pure young bride, looking the worthy mate of the great noble she had won with her beauty and her sweetness; a background of magnificent houses and equipages, of grand society people, of lackeys in livery without number; an atmosphere of luxury, refinement, perfumed with the fairest flowers and the most delicate artificial scents. You are seeing also the high and noble motives of all concerned—the joy of parents in a daughter sentimentally wooed and won to happiness; the generous and kindly feelings of all the friends; the lavish and affectionate overflowing of costly gifts; above all, the ecstatic young couple wrapped up in their love for each other. Flesh up and beautify the skeleton to your taste, gentle reader. You will not go amiss.

I must linger a moment on the happiness of my daughter. It was too spiritual to be of this earth. As soon as the miserable, unimportant money matters were settled, and her mother gave her full leave to love, she threw herself into it with all the ardor of the heroine of a novel. She had two diamond hearts made—at the most fashionable jewelers in Paris, you may be sure. Upon the inside of the one she kept she had engraved, under his picture, “From Hugh to Margot.” In the one she gave him there surrounded her picture in diamond inlay, “To Hugh from his dear love Margot.”

Each was to wear the heart round the neck until death. Again and again I caught her dreaming over hers, sometimes with tears in her limpid eyes. Again and again I caught her scribbling, “Margot, Marchion-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ess of Crossley, Viscountess Brear, Countess of Felday and Noth, Baroness de Selve," and so on through a list of titles which gentle reader will find in "Burke's" and the "Almanach de Gotha."

And she had a reverent way of looking at him and a tender way of touching him. Her mother, you will believe, spared neither expense nor pains in getting together the trousseau. But Margot was not satisfied. "Not nearly fine enough for *his* bride," she would say. "I'm *so* afraid he'll be disappointed." Then the tears would spring. "Oh, mamma! If he should be disappointed in me!"

"Not so bad as if you were to be disappointed in him," I put in with no other motive than to cheer her up.

But it only shocked her. "In Hugh!" she exclaimed, meaning in Cecil Robert Grunleigh Percival Hugh Massingford, Marquis of Crossley, etc. "I disappointed in *him*! Oh, papa! You don't *realize*!"

"No, I suppose not," said I, getting myself away as speedily as my legs would carry me.

Through these joyous scenes of youth and love and luxury I moved gloomily—restless, bitter, tormented by self-reproaches and by thoughts of the woman I loved. What Edna had said about her, though I knew it was by way of precautionary cattishness, put into my mind the inevitable suspicion—no, not actual suspicion, but germ of suspicion—the almost harmless germ from which the most poisonous suspicions may develop. I went round and round my mental image of Mary Kirkwood. I viewed it from all angles. But I could not find a trace of the flaw Edna had asserted. I analyzed

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

her with all the analytical skill I possessed, and that, I flatter myself, is not a little. No one who has not the faculty of analysis ever gets anywhere; no one who has that faculty ever escapes the charge of cynicism. Shallow people—the sort that make such a charge—will regard it as proof of my utter cynicism, my absolute lack of sentiment, that I was able to analyze the woman I loved, or pretended I loved. But I assure you, gentle reader, that not even love and passion suspend the habitual processes of a good mind. The reason you have read the contrary so often is because precious few writers about men of the superior sort have the capacity to comprehend the intellects they try to picture. To the man of large affairs, the average—and many a one above the average—biography or novel about a great man reads like the attempt of a straddle bug to give his fellow straddle bugs an account of an elephant.

I was the only inharmonious figure in that round of festivals. But no one observed me. I simply got the reputation of being a man of reserve, a thinker rather than a talker—as if there ever lived a thinker who did not overflow with torrents of talk like a spring fed from a glacier; but, of course, the spring flows only when the conditions are favorable, not when it is ice-bound. I was not even interested in observing. There is a monotony about the actions of fashionable people that soon reduces a spectator of agile mind to stupor. The same thing over and over again, with variations so slight that only a nit-wit would be interested in them—Could there be a worse indictment of the intelligence of the human race than that so large a part of its pre-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

sumably most intelligent classes engage in the social farce, which is an example of aimless activity about on a level with a dog's chasing its own tail?

But Edna——

As I look back on those weeks of days, each one crowded like a ragbag with rubbish, the figure of Edna stands out radiant. You would never have thought her the mother of the bride—or, indeed, a mother at all. A woman who for many years leads a virginal or almost virginal life gets back the vestal air of the unmarried girl. This air had returned to Edna. She had it as markedly as had Margot. It was most becoming to her piquant style of beauty, giving it the allure of the height that invites ascent and capture, yet has never been desecrated. And how she did enjoy the grandeur—the great names, the gorgeous presents of curiously and costlily wrought gold and silver and crystal, and precious stones, the succession of panoramas of ultra-fashionable life, with herself and Margot always the center.

I used to stand aside and watch her and feel as if I were hypnotized into vivid hallucinations. I recalled the incidents of our early life—Brooklyn, the Passaic flat, the squat and squalid homes of our childhood. I recalled our people—hers and mine—tucked away in homely obscurity among the New Jersey hills. But by no effort of mind could I associate her with these realities. She had literally been born again. I looked at the other Americans of humble beginnings—and there were not a few of them in that society. All had retained some traces of their origin, had some character-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

istics that made it not difficult to connect their present with their past. But not Edna.

At the wedding—in the most fashionable church in the West End—Margot looked weary and rather old, gone slightly stale from too long and hard preliminary training. Edna was at her best—delicate, fragile, radiant. How the other women hated her for that time-defying beauty of hers! Many of the women of her still youthful age retained much of the physical attractiveness of youth. But there was not another one who was not beginning to show the effects of dissipation—of too much food and wine and cigarettes, of lives devoid of elevating sensations, of minds used only for petty, mean thoughts. But Edna seemed in the flower of that period when the secrets of the soul have as yet made no marks upon the countenance. You would have said she was a merry and romantic girl. I could not fathom that mystery. I cannot fathom it now. Its clew must be in her truly amazing powers of self-deception and also in that unique capacity of hers for forgetting the thing, no matter what, that is disagreeable to remember.

When we were at last alone, with the young couple off for the yacht *Lord Shangway* had loaned them for the honeymoon, with the last guest gone and the last powdered flunkey vanished—when she and I were alone, she settled herself with a sigh and said:

“I wish I could make it begin all over again!”

“You must be built of steel,” said I.

“I am supremely happy,” said she, “and have been for weeks. Nothing agrees with me so thoroughly as happiness.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I looked at her scrutinizingly. No, she was not the least tired; she was as fresh as if that moment risen from a long sleep in the air of seashore or mountains.

She went on: "I'm going over to Paris to-morrow. I've a lot of engagements there. And I must get some clothes. I've worn out all I brought with me."

"Worn out" meant worn once or at most twice; for in a society where everyone is seeing everyone else all the time a woman with a reputation for dress cannot afford to reappear in clothes once seen. In some circles this would sound delightfully prodigal, in others delightfully impossible, and perhaps in still others delightfully criminal. But then all that sort of thing is relative—like everything else in the world.

"Won't you come along?" said she in a perfunctory tone.

"No, thanks," I replied. "I'm off for Russia with a party of bankers to look at some mining properties."

"I thought you were returning to New York?"

"Not for several months," said I.

"How can you stay away so long from your beloved America?"

"Business—always business."

She eyed me somewhat as one eyes a strange, mildly interesting specimen. "Well—you must enjoy it, or you wouldn't keep at it year in and year out."

"One has to pass the time," said I.

"How does Mary Kirkwood pass the time?"

This unexpected and—except sub-consciously—accidental question, staggered me for an instant. "I don't know much about it," said I. "She has a house



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

—and she looks after it, herself. She reads, I believe. She has gardens—and they use up a lot of time. Then she rides.”

Edna yawned. “It sounds dull,” she said. “But domestic people are always dull. And she is certainly domestic. I wonder why she doesn’t marry again.”

I was silent.

“Are any men attentive to her? It seems to me I heard something about a novelist—some poor man who is after her money.”

I was choking with rage and jealousy.

“Did you see any such man about?”

I contrived to compose myself for a calm reply. “No one answering to your description,” said I.

“Do you like her?”

“You asked me that once before,” said I.

“Oh—I forgot. It seems to me you and she would have exactly suited each other. You like domestic women. That is, you think you do. Really, you’d probably fly from a woman of that sort.”

“And a woman of the other sort would fly from me,” said I, laughing.

She looked at me thoughtfully. “You must admit you’re not easy to get on with—except at a distance,” observed she. “But men of positive individuality are never easy to get on with. A big tree blights all the little trees and bushes that try to grow in its neighborhood. . . . No, Godfrey dear, you weren’t made for domestic life—you and I. Domestic life is successful only where there are two very small and very much alike. People like us have to live alone.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I rose abruptly. There was for me a sound in that "alone" like the slam of a graveyard gate.

"You never will appreciate me—how satisfactory I've been," she went on, "until you marry again."

"I must make my final arrangements for Russia," said I.

"Shall I see you in the morning? I'm leaving rather early."

"Probably not," said I.

"Then we'll meet when you come back. We'll visit Margot at Sothewell Abbey." She rose, drew herself to her full height with a graceful gesture of triumph. "Don't you honestly rather like it, being the father of a Marchioness?"

I could not speak. I looked at her.

"How solemn you are!" laughed she. "Well, good-by, dear." And she held out her hand and turned her face upward for me to kiss her lips.

"Oh, I'll probably see you in the morning," I said, "or to-night." And away I went.

From Russia I drifted to India, intending to return home by the Pacific. At Bombay I met Lord Blankenship, and he persuaded me to cross to East Africa. I found him a companion exactly to my taste. He was a silent chap having nothing to think about and nothing to think with—a typical and model product of the aristocratic education that completes a man as a sculptor completes an image, and prepares him to stand in his appointed niche until decay tumbles him down as rubbish. I had lost all my former passion for talking

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

and listening. I wished to confine myself—my thoughts—to the trivial matters of the senses, to lingering over and tinkering with the physical details of life. The silent and vacant Blankenship set me a perfect example, one easy to fall into the habit of following.

At Paris, I picked up my private secretary, Markham, and resumed attention to my affairs. I had arranged for things to go on without me, when I set out for East Africa. I found that my guess as to how they would go had been correct. For a month or so there was confusion—the confusion that is inevitable when a man who has attended to everything abruptly throws up his leadership. Then the affairs in which he fancied himself indispensable begin to move as well as if he were at the throttle—perhaps better. The most substantial result of my neglect seemed to be that I had become much richer, had more than recovered what my purchase of a son-in-law had cost me.

Markham, who had been at Cairo two months, had got himself engaged to be married. For several years I had been promising him a good position, that is to say, one more fitting a grown man of real capacity. But he made himself so useful that I put off redeeming my promise and eased my conscience and quieted his ambition with a succession of increases of salary. Now, however, I could no longer delay releasing him. So I must go back to New York, to find some one to take his place. Blankenship was wavering between a trip through West Africa and going to America with me, on the chance of my accompanying him on a shooting trip through British Columbia. He decided to stick

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

to me, and as I had grown thoroughly used to having him about I was rather glad. It is astonishing how much comfort one can get out of the society of a silent man, when one feels that he is a good fellow and a devoted friend.

I telegraphed Edna that I would be unable to come to London, where she then was. But she defeated my plan for not seeing her. When I reached Paris there she was waiting for me at the Ritz. She had a swarm of French, Italians, and English about her—I believe there were some Germans or Austrians, also. I refused to be annoyed with them, and we dined quietly with Blankenship, Markham, and a pretty little Countess de Salevac to act as buffers between us. I tried to avoid being left alone with her, but she would not have it so. She insisted on my coming to her sitting room after the others had gone.

“I know you are tired,” said she, “but I shan’t detain you long.”

“Please don’t,” said I. “The journey has knocked me out. I’ve not slept for two nights.”

“It’s a shame to worry you——”

I made for the door. “Not to-night—no worries. They’ll keep until to-morrow.”

“No, Godfrey dear,” she said. “I must tell you at once. There is serious trouble between Margot and Hugh.”

“Why, they haven’t been married a year.”

“He has been treating her shamefully from the outset. In fact, he cut short the honeymoon to hurry back to that music-hall person.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"The one I saw him with?"

"Yes—the same one—that notorious Jupey What's-her-name. Isn't it dreadful! Margot's pride is up in arms. Nothing I say will quiet her."

"Um," said I.

"She refuses to understand that over here husbands are allowed a—a——"

"Latitude," I suggested.

"More latitude than in America. I have talked with Hugh, too. He is—very difficult. Really, he isn't at all as he seemed. He is a—he is horribly coarse."

"People who think of nothing but how to get money without work and how to spend it without usefulness are apt to be coarse, when you probe through to the reality of them."

"He is—defiant," pursued she, too femininely practical to have interest in or patience with philosophy. "He— Godfrey, he says he hates her. He won't speak to her. And there's no prospect of an heir. He says he wants to get rid of her."

These successive admissions of a worse and worse mess were forced from her by my air of indifference. "What has *she* done?" I asked.

"Done? I don't understand——"

"What has she done to drive him to extremes?"

"Godfrey!" she cried in a shocked tone. "You—taking sides against your daughter—your only child! Have you no paternal feeling, either?"

"Not much," said I. "You see, I've seen little of Margot—not enough to get acquainted with her. And you educated her so that we are uncongenial. No—

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

since you set me to thinking, I find I haven't much paternal feeling for her. I used to have in Passaic, when I wheeled her about the streets on Sundays."

I paused to enjoy the shame my wife was struggling with.

"But soon after we moved to Brooklyn——"

Edna winced and shivered.

"You sent her away to begin to be a lady. And a lady she is—and ladies are not daughters—are not women even."

"You must help me, Godfrey," said Edna, after a strained silence. "Margot is wretched, and a dreadful scandal may break out in time. Already people are talking. Margot is ashamed to show herself in public. She thinks everyone is laughing at her."

"No doubt she's right," said I. "A woman who loses her husband on the honeymoon is likely to be laughed at. . . . What did she do?"

"Why do you persist in saying that?" cried she, so irritated that she could not altogether restrain herself. "Your dislike of women has become a mania with you."

"But I don't dislike them," replied I. "On the contrary, I like them—like them so well that their worthlessness angers me like the treachery of a friend. And I believe so much in their power that, when things go wrong, I blame them. They have dominion over the men and over the children. And whenever they use their powers it is to make fools of the men and weaklings of the children. I don't know which is the worse influence—the wishy-washy, unpractical, preacher morality of the

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

good woman or the lazy, idle, irresponsible dissipation of the—the ladies and near-ladies and lady-climbers and lady-imitators.”

“But this has nothing to do with poor Margot!” exclaimed she impatiently.

“Everything to do with her,” replied I. “Still—it’s a spilt pail of milk. As for the present—and future—How can I do anything to help her?”

“You can’t, if you condemn her unheard.”

“I don’t condemn her. I am simply recognizing that there are two sides to this quarrel. And I assure you, you only make matters worse when you interfere without recognizing that fact. So I say again, what did *she* do?”

My wife calmed slightly and replied: “He says she made him ridiculous with the airs she put on.”

I laughed. “After the education you gave her?”

“That’s right! Blame me!”

“And aren’t you to be blamed?” urged I. “Didn’t you have full charge of her from the time she was born? Couldn’t you have made what you pleased of her? Didn’t you make what you pleased of her?”

Edna tossed her head indignantly. “I never taught her to be a vulgar snob.”

“Why, I thought that was her whole education.”

Edna ignored this interruption. “It’s all very well for the women of noble families to act the snob,” pursued she. “Lots of them do, and no one criticises. But Margot ought to have had sense enough to realize that she, a mere American, couldn’t afford to do it. I warned her that her cue was sweetness and an air of equality.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I told her that her title in itself would keep people at their proper distance. But she lost her head."

"Then the thing for her to do is to behave herself."

"It's too late, I'm afraid. The tide has turned against her. All the women—especially the titled English women of good family—were against her—hated her—were ready to stab her in the back. And her haughtiness and condescension gave them the chance."

"Well, what do you propose? To give him more money?"

Edna showed none of her familiar scorn of sordid things. She reflected, said uncertainly: "I wonder would that do any good?"

"To win anyone give them what they most want," said I. "What do your friends over here want above everything and anything?"

"Perhaps you are right," confessed she. Consider, gentle reader, what this confession involved, how it exposed the rotten insincerity of all her and her fine friends' pretenses. "Yes, I guess you're right, Godfrey." She pressed her hands to her temples. "It simply *must* be straightened out. I am quite distracted. I can't afford to lose sleep and to be harrowed up. Those things mean ruin to a woman's looks. And what *would* I do if she were flung back on my hands in this disgraceful fashion!"

"You want me to go to London?"

"Godfrey, you *must* go. You must see her, and him, too."

"I was thinking it would be enough to see him. But perhaps you're right."



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"She is clean mad," cried Edna, with sudden fury against her daughter. "She doesn't appreciate the peril of her position. One minute she's all for groveling. The next she talks like an idiot about her rank and power. Oh, she is a fool—a *fool!* I always knew she was—though I wouldn't admit it to myself. You never will know what a time I've had training her to hide it enough to make a pleasing appearance. She is a brainless fool."

"A fool, but not brainless," said I. "Her education made her a fool and paralyzed her brain. You see, she didn't have the advantages you had in your early training. In your early days you had the chance to learn something—the useful things that have saved you from the consequences of such folly as you've taught her."

"What nonsense!" cried Edna in disgust. "But we mustn't quarrel. I'm agitated enough already. You will go to London?"

"Yes," said I, after reflecting. "I'll go."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"And I'll go with you."

"No," said I firmly. "Either I manage this affair alone or I have nothing to do with it."

"But, Godfrey, there are so many things about these people that you don't understand. And you——"

"I understand the essential thing," said I. "And that is their mania for money."

She was on the verge of hysteria—afraid I would not go, afraid of what I would do if I did go. "But

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

they have to be handled carefully," she urged. "If you put them in a position where their pride won't let them take the—the money——"

"Trust me," said I. "Go to bed, sleep soundly, and trust me."

I stood. She suddenly flung herself against my breast and began to sob on my shoulder. "You are hard and cold," she said. "You have no sympathy with me—no feeling for anything but business. But somehow—in spite of it all—I have such a sense of your strength and your honesty."

I laughed rather awkwardly, patted her shoulder, helped her to a chair. "There are times when a coarse, common American business man of a husband has his uses—and advantages," I said lightly. "I'll telegraph you how things are going."

She dried her eyes, looked at me in a puzzled way. "You always repulse me," she said.

"I appreciate your kindness in remembering to toss a few crumbs to the starving man," laughed I. "They are precious crumbs, no doubt, and more than he deserves. But—please don't do it. He hates that sort of thing. You are free to act as you feel like acting. I'll do as much for you and Margot without the crumbs as with them."

"How hard you are, Godfrey! How you have always misunderstood me!"

"That's right," said I amiably. "I'm too coarse for such a fine nature. Well—good night."

I took myself hastily away to bed; and at ten the next morning I departed for London.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I decided to see Margot first. She was at Sothewell Abbey, about an hour by express from Paddington. You perhaps know Sothewell Abbey through the pictures and descriptions. And it is indeed an imposing pile of old masonry seated in the midst of a park of surpassing beauty. As soon as I entered the ancient gates for the two-mile drive to the Abbey, I saw signs that my money was in action. When I first visited it, the lodge was in sad disrepair, the gates were about to fall to pieces and the vista of the drive was unkempt. Now, all was changed. The servile pair who came out to open for me, and made me fear they would drop down on their bellies and crawl before me, were neatly and properly dressed, in strong contrast to their former appearance.

The exterior of the house, which had been most "romantic" but obviously the front of poverty and decay, looked much better—not younger I hasten to assure you, quiet reader, but somewhat like a hairless, toothless old man when he gets a nice white wig on his pate and a set of good false teeth on his shriveled gums. I saw gardeners at work—and plenty there was for them to do. Within, I saw evidences of a more adequate staff of servants; but the great halls were dreary and bare and dingy. That was a cold summer in England, even colder than the summer usually is. So, the enormous house was literally uninhabitable, like all the European palaces, city and country, that I have been in. I can fancy what such a place must be in winter with no way of heating it but open fireplaces, and not many of them. I can't conceive any sane American, used to comfort in the way of steam heat, spending a winter in the English country.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I know it is done by Americans reputedly sane; but if those at home knew what Europe in winter meant—the old-fashioned “romantic” Europe—they would not believe their expatriated countrymen sane in sacrificing comfort and health to vanity. Yes, I believe they would; for, do not they, at home, make the same imbecile sacrifices to vanity in other ways?

“Take me to some small warm room,” said I to Margot, “before I catch my death of cold.” This the instant I was within doors and felt in my very marrow the clammy chill of that picturesque vaulted hall.

“There isn’t any warm room in the house,” replied she.

“How about the kitchen?” said I.

She looked alarmed—being her mother’s own daughter, in lack of the sense of humor as in many other ways. She said hastily: “The upstairs rooms are a little better.”

“They couldn’t be worse. These rooms are cold storage.”

“I’m getting used to it,” said she. “One doesn’t mind it so much after a while.”

Her nose was red and swollen, and her voice husky. She had a frightful cold at that very moment. “Why don’t you get out of here and go to a decent modern hotel in town?” said I.

“Give up possession!” cried she in horror. “He might not let me come back.”

It was too ridiculous. “Possession of what?” said I.

“Oh, *papa!*” cried she, in despair and shame at my coarse stupidity.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Possession of what?" I repeated. "Of a dirty, dingy old cold-storage plant. Why should you want to come back? Put on your wraps and let's fly to town by the next train."

She burst into tears. "I'd rather die!" she sobbed. "I *won't* give up my position. I am Marchioness of Crossley and I belong here."

"All right," said I. "Let's try the smaller rooms."

She led me up a vast stairway—it would have thrilled your soul, gentle reader. Think how it sounds, put into the fitting language— "The beautiful young Marchioness conducted her father up the ancient and magnificent stairway that rose from the spacious mediæval hall and swept in a curve of wonderfully wrought stone work, dating from the thirteenth century, to the upper chambers of the majestic old abbey." I hurried her as fast as I could, for we both were sneezing and a hideous draught like the breath of death was streaming from somewhere. I don't mind looking at pictures of abbeys and the like; but when I read of the grandeur of living in that sort of place, I laugh. The men who built them did as well as they could in the age they lived in. But what shall be said of men who dwell in them now, when infinitely better is to be had?

Those upper chambers! Cold, clammy, draughty—the furniture and hangings old and dowdy. And my daughter's room! Like a squalid, decrepit tenement flat. Yes, squalid; for the rugs and draperies were dirty, were stained and frayed. There was a distinct tenement odor.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Isn't it fascinating?" said she, gazing round with sparkling eyes.

"Where's the fire?" said I.

She led me to a smelly, low-ceilinged little room, like a segment out of a hovel. It was her boudoir, she informed me. In one wall, in a dinky fireplace burned a handful of fire.

"Is that it?" said I. "Is that all?"

"You must remember, papa," said she proudly, "that this isn't a *modern* house."

"Ring for a servant," said I. "This overcoat of mine is too light. I must have wraps if I'm to sit here. And you'd better get out your furs and put them on."

"The servants'd think me mad," said she. "Must you have a coat?"

"No—that spread will do," said I. And I jerked it from the sofa and flung it round my shoulders. "I don't want to upset your establishment. Good God, I had no idea people with any money at all anywhere on earth lived like this. If you're going to stay here, you must put in steam heat."

"Oh, we couldn't do that, papa dear," said she with a plaintive mingling of shame for me and apology for the tradition against sense and health.

"Let's get to business, Margot," said I. "Sit in the fireplace—that's right. What's the trouble? Your mother has explained—has told all she knew. I've come to find what the quarrel is *really* about."

"Has she told you of that woman?"

"Why did he go back to her?"

She began to sob. "Oh, the hideous things he said

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to me! I didn't dream a gentleman could talk like that. He called me a low American—said he was ashamed of me—said he was going to get rid of me at any cost, said——”

“But what had you *done!*” interrupted I.

“Nothing!” she cried, lifting her flushed face.

“Absolutely nothing—except worship him.”

“What had you done?” I repeated. As she started to rise I restrained her. “Stay in the fireplace. What was the beginning of the row—the very beginning?”

Her eyes wavered, but she said: “Nothing, papa!” though less vigorously.

“It was about money,” said I. “It always is—in all ranks of society. The beginnings of the quarrels have money at the bottom of them. Now—tell me!”

She was silent.

“I can't help you unless you do.”

“Oh, it was so sordid!” cried she. “And I thought him high above those things.”

“No one that's human is,” said I. “Any person who wears pants or skirts that have to be paid for is not above money.”

“He wanted me to turn over to him all I had,” said she. “Think of that!”

“I might have known,” said I.

“He said it was beneath his dignity as an English gentleman to have a wife independent of him. And, do you know, papa, I was so infatuated that I almost yielded. I could see his point of view. And I'd have been glad to come to him for every cent. Only—” She stopped short.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Only what?" I urged.

"I heard about that other woman. And his way of treating me— He said it was the proper way for a marquis to treat his marchioness. And I liked the dignity and the beauty of it all, when others were about. But it seemed to me that when we were alone— Oh, papa, I can't tell you these things."

"Never mind," said I. "I understand."

"And I was—a little jealous, away down in my heart—and suspicious. And I was afraid he wanted the money to spend on *her*."

"Um," said I. "You didn't tell your mother this?"

"She hates sordidness of every kind," said Margot. "And I hadn't the courage. Besides, I'm sure mamma would have advised me to let him have his way. She wouldn't sympathize with the—the weak side of my character."

I was interested. Could it be that Edna's daughter had a "weak"—a human side? Could it be that her education and her mode of life had not altogether killed the natural and made her soul a garden of artificial flowers only?

"So, you want to be free from him?" said I.

"Free from him!" cried she, aghast. "Give up my position? Oh, papa—never—*never*!"

"But you don't love him. Don't come away from that fire!"

She seated herself by the miserable smoky little blaze again. "He is my husband. I am his wife. I am the Marchioness of Crossley." And she drew herself up



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with as much of an air as her cold and the contracted space in the chimney-piece permitted. Unluckily, the sudden gesture caused a current of air, and she sneezed once—twice—three times.

“Better get those furs,” said I. “You want the man back?”

“Yes, indeed. I must have him back.” She clasped her hands and wailed, “If I only had a son! Then—*then* I’d show Hugh that he couldn’t trample on me. But he has me in his power now. If he casts me off I shan’t have any position at all. The women are down on me. They hate all the American women, except those who toady to them and give them money or jewelry or pay their bridge and dressmaker’s bills. And they’re only too glad of the chance to crush me. But they’ll not succeed!”

“Why not?” said I dryly.

She burst into tears. “Oh, I don’t know what to do! Papa, shall I give him the money?—sign over all my income to him and take only what he’ll allow me? And would he come back if I did?”

“He would not,” said I.

“Then—what *shall* I do? Oh, what slaves we women are! Think of it, papa! He wants to make a *slave* of me—said he didn’t believe in women gadding about and showing themselves off in costly dresses and causing scandalous talk—said my place was at home—looking after the house and that sort of thing!” She laughed wildly. “Like a low, common servant! And he—he free to carry on with that woman!”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You might teach him to stay at home, if you set him a good example," suggested I.

"But I don't want to stay at home!" cried she. "I didn't marry for that. I want to enjoy all the privileges of my rank."

"To be sure," said I.

"I wasn't brought up to be like a low, middle-class woman, or a workingman's wife."

"No, indeed," said I. "You are a lady. You're made, not to be of use in the world, but to enjoy yourself."

She seemed to find some cause for dissatisfaction in my enthusiastic tone. "Of course," she said, "I shall do my duty as a member of the high nobility—lead in society and open bazars and visit the poor on our estate and—and all that."

"Yes, indeed," said I. "And the world being what it is, there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"Do you think you can bring him back, papa?"

"That depends on you," said I warily.

"I'll do anything—anything. I'll crawl to him, if he wants me to. After all, he *is* the Marquis of Crossley, and I'm only an American nobody."

"That's the proper spirit," said I. "But you mustn't show it to him *too* plainly. Be moderate. A little pretense of dignity—of self-respect."

"I understand," said she seriously—she was indeed Edna's own daughter. "I'll be as I was before we were married." Her eyes flashed. "Oh, I can bide my time. When I have a son!"

"Get ready and come up to town to-night," said I,

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with a most unfatherly gruffness and curtness, I fear. "I'm off now to deal with him."

"Be careful not to wound his pride, papa," she cautioned.

"I realize the danger of that," replied I. "Come to the Savoy. Be on hand, so I can get hold of you whenever I need you."

"Oh, papa *dear!*" she cried, and cast herself into my arms.

I brushed my lips upon her crown of hair—it was false hair, that being the fashion of the day. "Try to make yourself as pretty as you can," said I, releasing her and myself. "You'll hear from me to-night or to-morrow, unless I've caught my death in this damp cave. You must leave it to the frogs, and snakes, and bats, and build yourself a decent house somewhere. You'll die here."

"I'm afraid Hugh wouldn't consent to *live* anywhere but here. It's the ancestral seat, you know. The Massingfords have lived here since forever and ever."

"Have died here, you mean. Have killed wives they wanted to get rid of, here."

She startled—looked excitedly at me. "Papa!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Yes—I wouldn't put it past him!"

I laughed.

She drew a long breath of relief. "Oh, you weren't in earnest," she said.

"No," replied I. "But—don't live here."

"I shan't," said she firmly. "It's dreadful for the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

looks. You've seen what so many of these English women look like."

"Like shriveled, frost-bitten apples," said I. "They don't die because they're used to it. But it's death for people accustomed to civilization. Not even the steady glow of pride in your title and position can keep you heated up enough to save you."

"Will you give Hugh a house, if he'll consent?"

"Yes. . . . Until to-night or to-morrow."

And I fled from the romantic old Abbey, but not soon enough to avoid what was threatening to be the cold of my life.

## IX

THE moment I was in London, and before that Sothewell Abbey cold had a chance to grip me, I went at it. Starve, stay in bed, and keep the air out for a day—that's the way to put a cold out of business. Unless it be some occasional prodigy endowed with superhuman common sense and self-restraint, no one learns how to take care of his health except by experience. The doctors know precious little about disease; about health they know nothing—naturally, they have no interest in health. The average human being not only does not know how to take care of his health, but also does not wish to learn how; health involves self-denial, cutting down on food, drink, tobacco and the other joys of life. So he who wishes to avoid enormous payments in discomfort and pain for slight neglects and transgressions of physical laws has to work it out for himself. I've made several valuable discoveries in the science and art of living; about the most valuable of them is that every illness starts under cover of a cold. So I instantly take myself in hand whenever I begin to sneeze and to have chilly sensations or a catch in the throat. The result has been that since I was thirty I have not spent a cent on doctors or lost a day through illness, and I've eaten and drunk about as I pleased. I can see gentle reader's expression

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of disdain at these confessions as to my care for health. You are welcome to your disdain, gentle reader. It is characteristic of your shallowness. You see, the chief difference between you and me is that I have imagination while you have not. And as I have imagination, illness makes to my mind a picture of revolting internal conditions which I can no more endure than I could endure having my outside unclean and frowzy.

Margot, coming by a later train, sent me word that she was ill. She had called in a doctor. He poured some medicine—some poison—into her, of course, and so got her into the way of giving him an excuse for robbing her. In England doctors rank socially with butchers and bakers, rank scientifically with voodoo quacks and astrologers. They still look on a cold as a trifle, and treat it by feeding! The food and drugs she swallowed soon reduced Margot to the state where it was taking all the reserve force of her youth to save her from severe illness. I was entirely well the following day, and went to see her. The doctor—five guineas or twenty-five dollars a visit—was coming twice a day; his assistant—two guineas or ten dollars a visit—was coming four times a day. The Marchioness of Crossley, a rich American, was ill. Her social position and Dr. Sir Spratt Wallet's rank as a practitioner together made it imperative that the illness be no ordinary affair. The second day he issued bulletins to the papers. I attempted to interfere in the treatment, but Margot would not have it.

"She's growing worse instead of better," said I to Wallet.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Certainly, sir," replied he. "That is the regular course with a cold." And he stroked his whiskers and looked at me with dull, self-complacent, supercilious eyes. "The regular course, sir."

"In England, but not in America," said I.

"I dare say," said he, with heavy politeness. Then, after a heavy pause, "her ladyship will be quite fit again in a week—quite fit."

As she was eating three strapping meals a day and taking rhinitis and another equally poisonous drug I had my doubts. But once you let a doctor in you are powerless. If you order him out without giving him an opportunity in his own good time to cure the mischief he has done the consequences may be serious. Not to linger over this incident in high life, Wallet made out of that cold a hundred guineas, not counting his commissions on the fees of his assistant, on the wages of a trained nurse, and on the stuff from the chemist. If Margot had been English born the bill would have been about one fourth that sum—for the same rank in society. Slay the Midianite! But that's the rule the world over. When I am "trimmed" abroad I console myself with reflecting on the fate of the luckless foreigner visiting America. Europe trims us to the quick; but we trim to the bone; and when no foreigners are handy we keep in practice by trimming one another.

Margot's illness did not interfere with my efforts to right her matrimonial ship and set it in its course again. I had greatly modified my original plan. It involved my seeking the Marquis. My new plan was to compel him to seek me. I proceeded so success-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

fully that on the morning of the third day of Margot's "indisposition," while I was at breakfast in my sitting room, Markham came in with a grin of triumph on his face. "You win," he cried. "But you always do."

"Dawkins?"

"Here's his card."

"Let him up. No—wait. . . . Tell him I'll see him in half an hour."

Gentle reader, you are about to learn why in that controversy over settlements *I* abruptly abandoned the struggle and yielded everything. I worked with Markham at my mail and telegrams for three quarters of an hour before I let Dawkins in. I saw at a glance that my treatment of him had produced the effect I had hoped. He was a typical middle-class Englishman—but all middle-class Englishmen are typical. He was fattish and baldish and smug. He had a beef-and-beer face, ruddy and smooth except tufts of red-gray, curling whiskers before either ear. He had cold, shrewd, pious eyes—the eyes of the hypocrite who serves the Lord with every breath he draws, and gets a blessing upon every crime he commits before committing it. In my first interviews with him I, being new to England, had made the mistake of treating him as an equal, that is, as a human being. My respect for myself forbids me to meet any of my fellow-members of the human race in any other fashion. But experience has taught me that in doing business with a man, it is being absolutely necessary that you dominate him unless you are willing to have him dominate you, the most skillful care must be taken to impress him with



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

your superiority. A certain amount of "side" is useful in America. A lot of it is imperative in England; and if you are dealing with an Englishman who feels that he is low, you dare not treat him as an equal or he at once imagines you are lower than he, and despicable—and you can do nothing with him.

I had suffered, and so had my lawyer, Norman, for our American way of treating Dawkins. I appreciated my mistake afterwards, and resolved not to repeat it. I studied the manner of Crossley and Blankenship and the other upper-class men toward the middle and lower classes, and I learned to copy it, an accomplishment of which I am not proud, though common sense forbids me to be ashamed of it. Dawkins, entering with heels thoroughly cooled, made ready to put out his hand, but did so hesitatingly. He saw that his worst fears were realized, altered the handshaking gesture into a tug at his right whiskers. Nor did I offer him a seat, but simply looked at him pleasantly over the top of my newspaper and said:

"Ah, Dawkins, is that you?"

"Good morning, Mr. Loring. Hope you are well, sir," said Dawkins, now squeezing awkwardly into his proper place.

I half turned my back on him and dictated a note and a telegram to Markham. Then I glanced at Dawkins again. "Ah, Dawkins, yes—what were you saying?"

"I would esteem it a favor, sir, if you would give me a few minutes of your time—alone."

"We are alone," said I. "What is it?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

The solicitor shifted his portly frame uneasily, smoothed his top hat with his gloved left hand, glanced dubiously at Markham. "The matter is confidential, sir—relating to—to the family."

"Mr. Markham knows more about my affairs than I do," said I. "Don't beat about the bush, Dawkins. I have no time to waste."

"Very well, sir. I beg your pardon. It concerns those bonds—the bonds you turned over to me in arranging the settlements."

"Yes. I remember. Great Lakes and Gulf bonds, were they not?"

"Precisely, sir. You bound us to a stipulation that they were not to be converted for at least five years."

"That's right," said I. "In fact, I made it impossible for you to convert them."

A pained expression came into the face of Dawkins.

"I believe I conceded everything else your client demanded," pursued I.

"But it now develops, sir," said Dawkins, "that that was the only important thing."

"Really?" said I.

"You have doubtless seen the papers these last few days—the stock market."

"Yes. . . . Yes—so the bonds *are* dropping. That's unfortunate."

"Dropping rapidly," said Dawkins. "And there are rumors that Great Lakes and Gulf will soon be practically worthless."

"So I've read."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I've come to ask you to release us. We wish to sell. We must sell. If we don't the settlement on your son-in-law will be worthless."

I smiled agreeably. "As worthless as his promises to my daughter. As worthless as he is."

Dawkins was breathing heavily. His pious eyes were snapping with rage. He had prided himself on his astuteness. He had gloated over his shrewdness in outwitting Norman and me. And now he discovered that the boot was on the other leg. I had trapped him and put him and his client in my power.

I leaned back comfortably and smiled. "Of course I know nothing about it, Dawkins, but I am willing to make a Yankee guess that the bonds will continue to drop until——"

When my pause became unendurable, he said: "Yes, sir. Until when?"

"Until I discover some signs of value in my son-in-law. Then he may discover some signs of value in the bonds. Our America is a peculiar country, Dawkins."

"Peculiar will do, sir," said he with respectful insolence. "But I should have chosen another word."

I shook my head laughingly. "What bad losers you English are!" said I. "But—I'll not detain you. Good morning, Dawkins."

"Then I am to understand, sir——"

But I had my back squarely to him and was busy with Markham, who took his cue for the little comedy we were playing like the well-trained American business

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

man that he was. Presently Markham said, "He's gone, and I never saw a madder man get out of a room more awkwardly."

You, gentle reader, who know about as much of the science of managing men in practical life as you know of any other phase of the world—that-is—you, gentle reader, are shocked by my rudeness to a polite, well-educated, well-dressed Englishman. And you hope—and feel—that I overreached myself. But let me inform you—not for your instruction but for my own satisfaction—courtesy has to be used most sparingly. Human vanity is so monstrous that men eagerly read into politeness to them—the most ordinary politeness—evidence that their superiority is inspiring fear, awe and desire to conciliate them. You often hear men in high place severely criticised for being rude, short, arrogant, insulting. Do not condemn them too hastily. It may be that they were driven into this attitude toward their fellows by the disastrous consequences of courtesy. Be polite to a man and he will misunderstand. Be cool to him and he, thickly enveloped in his own good opinion of himself, will not feel it. Rudeness, overt and unmistakable, is often the one way to reach him and save not only yourself but also him from the consequences of his vanity. It is the instinct of big men to be big and simple and natural in their dealings with their fellows. The mass of little men with big vanities compels them to suppress this instinct; and by suppression it inevitably becomes in time crushed out of existence. How can one who is busy continue to show consideration for others if they, instead of showing a return consideration

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

for him, take it as tribute to their importance and begin to rear and impose and trample?

To cite my own relatively unimportant case, I have long had a reputation for coldness and meager civility in my business relations. I recall distinctly the desperate pressure of sheer imposition that led me to abandon my early openness to all comers at all times. And I admit that I did change; rather abruptly, too, for it suddenly came to me why I was slipping backwards. But looking only at my career *since* the change, when I think of the boredom I have endured, the folly I have permitted to waste my valuable time—when I recall the forbearance I have shown in sparing impudent and lazy incompetence where I might, yes, ought to have used the ax—when I think of my good-natured tolerance in face of extremest daily provocation, year after year, I marvel at myself and feel how unjust, how characteristically the verdict of little shallow men, is the attack on me as cold and unsympathetic. When I consider how the leaders of the human race have been tempted to tyranny, I cannot understand why history is able to record comparatively few real tyrants, most of them being homicidal lunatics like Nero, or success-crazed megalomaniacs like Napoleon, and almost none men of sanity. If the great of earth were as vain, as selfishly, as egotistically inconsiderate of the small as the small are of the great and of each other, would not the story of history have come to an end long ago for lack of surviving characters?

Two days after Dawkins came Crossley. I knew that in America there is no one so easily frightened as

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

a rich man who has inherited his wealth and does not know whether, if he lost it, he could make a living or not. All rich men are cowards, but that species is craven. I suspected that the same thing was true of the European type—the nobleman with the grotesque pose of disdain for money that convinces and captivates you, gentle reader, and your favorite authors. Crossley's face instantly showed me that my suspicion was correct. He had been dissipating wildly for several weeks, but it did not account for the look in his eyes. If, gentle reader, you wish to learn the truth about the aristocracy you worship—which you do not—get an aristocrat where you can cut off or turn on his supply of cash at will. You will then discover that he who has a stiff neck also has supple knees—the stiffer the neck the suppler the knees.

Crossley was a clever chap in his way; that is, he knew his business of idle spender of unearned money thoroughly. Another mode of putting it would be the commonplace and less exact if more alluring phrase “aristocrat to his finger tips.” There are many modes of cringing. He showed judgment and taste—judgment of me, taste in sparing himself—in his choice of the mode. With fright and wariness in his eyes—the look of readiness to go to any depths of self-abasement in gaining his end—he put a tone of manly, bluff, shame-faced contrition into his voice as he said:

“Pardon my breaking in on you this way. I’ve just heard. Is *she* very ill?”

He meant he had just heard about the bonds. I knew he meant that, and he knew I knew it. But we

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

were men of the world. "Not desperately ill," said I. "Only about twenty guineas a day."

He smiled a faint but flattering appreciation of my humor, then resumed his gloomy anxiety and self-reproach. "But she *is* ill. I read it in one of those screaming ha'penny rags and came as fast as ever I could. The truth is—well, we've had a bit of a row. Has she told you?"

"Not much," said I. "A little."

"I've acted the skunk, the howling skunk—and I want to— Do you think she'll see me?"

"If you wish, I'll find out."

"I'd be no end grateful," said he with enthusiasm.

She saw him as soon as she could make herself presentable—and her delay gave him a chance to tone up his nerves and to smooth out his face. That afternoon I was able to telegraph Edna that all was well. The Crossleys were reconciled; Love had scored another of his famous triumphs. She came over the following day, but I had sailed for America a few hours before.

The day after my arrival in New York I saw Mary Kirkwood and Hartley Beechman lunching together at Delmonico's. In those days that meant an engagement actual or impending—or, at least, a flirtation far advanced into the stage of loverlike intimacy. I was in the passageway looking through the glass and the screen of palms. I stood there long, noting every detail of her. She was well, perfectly well—of that much her eyes and her color assured me. Is there anything

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

lovelier than a clear dark skin, tastefully set off by black-brown hair? Was she happy? I could not tell. Still in her face was that restless, expectant look—not unlike the expression of a child being shown a picture book and too impatient for the next page rightly to examine the one that is open. An intense interest in life, an intense vitality—that fascinating capacity to love, if she found the right man. And her beauty——

Beauty she undoubtedly had. But charm does not lie in beauty—physical charm, I mean. There is a certain light in the eyes, a certain curve of cheek and throat, of bosom and arm—and the blood flames and rushes. She had charm for me. Her beauty impressed others; it was her charm that made her the one woman to me.

Blankenship came to take me into the café where we were to lunch. I went with the meager consolation that while I had stood there she had given Beechman not a single glance with any suggestion of a feeling it would have wounded me to the quick to see. Should I speak to her? Did I dare risk the attempt? Would not speaking to her be merely a useless torment? After a long struggle that could have but one end, I said: “Excuse me,” rose and went to the palm room. They were gone; the waiter was clearing the table at which they had been sitting. I stared round dazedly, returned to Blankenship.

“You’re not up to the mark—what?” said he.

“New York doesn’t agree with me.”

“I hate towns. They give you such dirty second-hand stuff to breathe. Let’s move on—what?”



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

“To-morrow,” I said.

But it seemed there was no place on earth for me. Don't judge me so poorly as to think, or to imagine I thought, this was due wholly to Mary Kirkwood. I wish to be carefully, exactly accurate in this frank recital of a man's point of view. She was responsible for my forlorn state to the extent that loving her had revealed to me the futility and failure of my own life and had made me see another sort of life that would have been possible with her, that was impossible without her—without love and comradeship. But loving her did not make my life empty; it was already empty, though I had not realized it. I understood now why the big business men, as soon as they reached security, cast about for some real interest. Most of them—nearly all—were as unfortunate in their family relations as I. They had trivial wives and trivial children—mere silly strutters and spenders. They sought interest in art, in science, in religion, in exploration, in philanthropy, in politics, in stamps and butterflies, in old books and antiques, in racing stables and prize fighting, in gambling, in drink, in women. Their craving was now mine. How to find an interest that would make life attractive to me, with Mary Kirkwood left out—there was my problem.

While waiting for the solution, I followed Blankenship to the Northwest. The second day from New York, as he and I were walking up and down the platform during a halt—at St. Paul, I think it was—Hartley Beechman joined us.

“Didn't I see you in the café at Delmonico's a few

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

days ago?" said he. "I was getting my hat and stick in a rush. It certainly looked like your back."

"It was," said I. And I was seized with a wild longing to escape from him and a wilder longing to hold on to him and to pour out question after question.

"Mrs. Kirkwood and I were lunching together," he went on. "We talked of you. I told her I thought I had seen you, and she said she heard you were in town and was much hurt because you hadn't looked her up."

"I was merely passing through," said I.

"She has an enormous admiration for you," continued he. "She says you have imagination—which means that she thinks you in the small class. You know the world divides into sheep and goats on imagination, with the mass in the have-not class. I believe it's the true distinction between House of Have and House of Have-not."

"She is well?" said I.

"Always. She knows how to take care of herself. I never knew a woman so sensible—and sensible means the reverse of what it's usually supposed to mean when applied to a woman."

This hardly sounded like an engaged man talking of his fiancée. On the other hand, Beechman was a peculiar chap.

"Does she still live in the country?"

"Just now—yes. Last winter she kept house for Bob in New York."

But you will not be interested in how I drew from him bit by bit a hundred details of her life, stories of

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

what she had said and done. I saw Beechman several hours every day until he left us at Seattle. Alternately I thought him merely her closest man friend and her accepted lover. At times I thought he was not quite sure, himself, in which position he stood. When we were having our last talk together I nerved myself and said:

"I heard in London that she was to be married."

I felt him drawing in and shutting all doors and windows.

"Have *you* heard anything of it?" pursued I.

"Oh, in the case of a woman like her," replied he, "there's always gossip about this man and that."

"She ought to marry."

"She *will* marry."

I forced a smile, and, as we knew each other so well, I ventured: "You speak as one having authority."

"Don't *you* know she will?" parried he.

"That sounds like evasion," laughed I.

"Not at all. She cannot escape. Some man will convince her—surely."

"But so far as you know, no man has?"

His eyes were frankly mocking. "I did not say that," said he.

And I could get no further.

Before I returned to New York in the autumn I had added a lot of far western enterprises to my already long list of occupations. Everything I touched seemed to succeed. Even my new secretary, Rossiter, proved better than Markham. Markham had an indifferent memory and a fondness for women that was

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

trying. Rossiter forgot nothing and was as shy of the women, including the ladies, as was Lord Blankenship, who yawned and retreated at the very sight of a skirt. The news from England was altogether satisfactory. An heir was hoped for, and Crossley had become a devoted husband and was about to enter politics. This struck me as a huge joke, the more so because I knew that in England Crossley would be welcomed as a source of real strength to his party. It seemed to me amazing how England could stagger along when she was being managed by such men and was grateful for it. But when I spoke to Blankenship about it, he set me to thinking from a different standpoint.

"My son-in-law is going into politics," said I. "In America he couldn't be elected dog-catcher."

"Oh, I fancy money will do most anything most anywhere," said he.

The news from Paris was equally good. Edna had settled there after a joyous summer going from country house to country house in Britain, and from chateau to chateau in France. She had seen one chateau which she wished me to buy, and she begged me to come over and inspect it. She did not explicitly say so, but I read between the lines that she was greatly strengthening her social position by giving out that she proposed buying a big place. You may imagine how much enthusiasm for her such an announcement would create among noble down-at-the-heel families eager to exchange unsalable old rook-roosts for American dollars. I could hear her talking—how subtly she would put forth the suggestion, how diplomatically she would dis-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

cuss each worthless stone heap in turn—and how she would rake in the invitations so difficult to get unless one happens to know how, and so easy when one does know.

But with my arrival in New York I had a reverse. A cable came from Edna saying that she was sailing at once and wished to see me.

I could not imagine what she wanted, and I did not waste much time in making guesses. One evening, when Armitage and I were dining together in the Federal Club—Blankenship had sailed for home—the idea flashed into my mind that perhaps Edna wanted a divorce. Immediately I felt that I had hit upon the precise reason for her coming. You will have no difficulty in imagining what was the next idea in my train of thought. If she divorced me I should be free to marry whom I pleased!

It was stupid of me, but in all my revolvings of my hopeless love for Mary Kirkwood never once had I thought of divorcing my wife. I cannot account for this lapse, except as an instance of the universal human failing for overlooking the obvious. There was no religious scruple in my early training to make me shy of divorce. On the contrary, my parents, like most old-fashioned Americans of faiths other than Episcopal and Catholic—and Episcopalians and Catholics were few in the old American stock, except in New York and Baltimore and South Carolina—most old-fashioned Americans believed that living together in wedlock without love was sin, that divorce was no mere necessary evil, but a religious rite as sacred as mar-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

riage itself. A house, they held, is either a House of Hate or a House of Love, and no one should remain in a House of Hate, and no child should be brought up there.

No doubt, if Edna and I had been living under the same roof the idea of divorce would have taken form, actively definite form, long before. But we had no home to be a House of Hate. We did not hate each other; we bored each other. And as we were not poor, we lived far enough apart not to annoy each other in the least. I cheerfully paid any ransom she exacted for leaving me free—and you may be sure she was not inexpensive. She had her own fortune—and it gave her quite an income—but she husbanded that. She insisted upon state and equipage, not to mention such small matters as stockings at fifty dollars a pair and chemises at three hundred dollars apiece—for, she knew how lovely she was and demanded for her beautiful body the most beautiful garments that could be devised by French ingenuity at combining cost and simplicity. I was—by instinct rather than by avowed principles—thoroughly old-fashioned in my family ideas. Indeed, I still am; and I say this with no apology. It may be that woman will some day develop another and higher sphere for herself. But first she would do well—in my humbly heretical opinion—to learn to fill the sphere she now rattles round in like one dry pea in a ten-gallon can. I want to see a few more women up to the modern requirements for wife and mother. I want to see a few more women making a living without using their sex charms—a few less

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

'tending the typewriter with one eye while the other and busier is on the lookout for a husband. I believe in emancipation of women—in votes for women—in all that sort of thing. The one and only way to learn to swim is in the water. I am sick and tired of woman the irresponsible, woman the cozenor and milker of man, woman the dead weight upon man, and drawing the pay of a housewife and shirking all a housewife's duties. So, you see, I am the friend of woman—not of woman's vanity and laziness and passion for parasitism, but of woman's education and self-respect and independence.

I was thoroughly old-fashioned. My notion of wife was the independent, self-respecting equal of her husband. That is, I had the typical American husband's ideal—the ideal that dates from the pioneer days of no property and of labor for all, the ideal the American man still lives up to, the one that enables woman to betray him. And, having this ideal, I never permitted myself—no, not even when I spoke to her the contrary in words—I never permitted myself to *feel* that my wife was not in the main what she should be.

If you have borne me company thus far, gentle reader, turn away now. For, dreadful things are coming. I said to Armitage: "Your sister—she's still in the country?"

"No, she's abroad," replied he. "She's visiting friends in Budapest. Later on she's to yacht in the East Mediterranean—she and the Horace Armstrongs and Beechman—and—" He gave several names I do not now recall.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Is she engaged to Beechman?" I asked carelessly, but the question was not one that could sound other than raw.

He smiled—an expression I did not like. At first I thought it a rebuke to my impertinence. Afterwards I saw no such notion was in his mind. "Beechman? Good Lord, no."

"You are *sure*?"

"Absolute. He'd not dare go in that direction with *her*."

"Why not?" said I.

"Oh—well—you see— She doesn't care for him," replied Armitage lamely. I was not liking him so well, now that I knew the world—his world—better and could judge its beliefs and its hypocrisies more accurately.

"He's an unusual man," said I. "She might easily care for him."

"Well, she doesn't," retorted he irritably. "I happen to know she doesn't."

I was convinced. Armitage's tone said in effect that he had heard the rumor, had questioned her, had been assured that there was no basis for it.

So, she was abroad—five or six days away. I could not go to her and make a beginning. Would I have gone if she had been within reach? I do not know. I rather think not. As I have said, I was old-fashioned; and the sort of love I felt for her, and my sense of what she had suffered at the hands of the first man she had trusted would have made me wait, I hope, until I was free. Still, love is insidiously compelling. Who can say what love would or would not beguile or goad him into



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

doing? The old-fashioned man, always reminding himself that women haven't an equal chance with men, was inclined to be considerate in his dealings with a woman. The new-fashioned man lets her look out for herself. I am not sure that he is wrong. Perhaps some who have read thus far will guess the reason for my doubt.

You may imagine how impatiently I waited for Edna to arrive. I am afraid Rossiter found me difficult in those intervening days. Only the weak sort of men and women are easy for an intelligent person to live with. Men and women of positive character have their impossible moods. I made this remark to Mary Kirkwood on that yachting trip in the Sound. And her quick answer was: "Yes, that's true. But everything worth while is difficult. Weathering the stormy days would have its compensations—and more." What a woman! No wonder I loved her.

When Edna finally arrived——

What an arrival it was! She was attended by two maids, one French, the other Italian. She had trained them—she and their former fashionable mistresses—to treat her as if she was a royal person, requiring the most minute assistance, incapable even of ascertaining for herself whether it was daylight or dark, rain or shine. She was clad in the latest Paris fashions, adapted and improved for her own especial charms. She wore much jewelry, but nothing noisy. There never was anything noisy about her—any more than there is about a burst of sunshine that fills and floods the whole place, permeating everywhere and dominating everything. She talked by turns in English—with a superb British accent.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

—in French that sounded Parisian and in Italian that seemed as liquid and swift as the Italian maid's. It was a vast ship, and there were about a thousand passengers, and much luggage. To me, to all on the pier that day, there seemed to be but one landing and but one lot of luggage.

How many trunks had she? Heaven only knows. The customs people were glad to expedite her after a glance at the exhibit imposing both in extent and in costliness. She affected a delightful, most aristocratic unconsciousness of the stir she was making, of the excited admiration of men, of the gaping or jeering envy of women. Yes, it was a great day, and as I accompanied her in the auto to the Plaza, I felt dowdy and insignificant—felt like a humble male menial, a courier or valet.

"I did not fully appreciate your magnificence," said I, "until I saw you on these humble shores."

"It *is* shocking here— isn't it?" said she. "So incomplete, so crude. No wonder the ideals are low. The surroundings give no inspiration."

"None—except for work," said I. "It's a land for working people only. No doubt you'll be going back soon?"

"As soon as I can," replied she. With a friendly but not tender smile: "As soon as you'll let me."

The absence of her customary effusiveness confirmed my theory of her coming. I had thought all out with the utmost care. I felt it would be in every way unwise to let her see that I was eager for the divorce. She must open the subject. It had ever been my rule, when

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I wanted anything, so to maneuver that the other person should propose the exchange. It is the rule of successful operation in every department of life. Therefore, adhering strictly to my prearranged programme, I could only sit tight and wait.

How she tried my patience! I was mad to have the preliminaries over, to have the divorce under way—mad, not with the hysterical impatience of those short-sighted people who mess their purposes through lack of self-restraint, but with the white-hot repressed patience of those who have their way in this world. Day followed day, and she did not speak. I gave up the evenings and a large part of the afternoons to her. I stayed on after dinner until there was no further excuse for lingering. I listened to her interminable recital of fashionable names, dates, gossip, adventure. A week of this, and just as my fortitude was wearing itself out and I had begun to debate opening the subject myself, she said:

“I’ve been down looking at our house. Really it’s not half bad. Why shouldn’t we open it?”

I did not know what to say. Was I mistaken in her purpose in coming? Or was this proposal to open the house the clever move of a clever gamester to force me to speak first?

“This lovely weather!” she went on. “It’s a shame such a climate should be wasted upon such a vulgar city. When I think of the dreadful rains that infest Paris and the rains and fogs of London— How they would glory in this sun and sparkling air.”

To my notion New York was vastly more attractive than dreary London or rainy, sloppy Paris. But I made

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

no defense of New York. I wished her to think it crude and tiresome.

"And the fashionable society here," she went on. "What a silly copy of the real thing over there!"

"It must remind you of Passaic," said I.

She visibly shivered.

I was suddenly seized of a base inspiration. In my despair I did not hesitate. Said I: "That reminds me. We must go over to see the old people."

"Oh, yes," she murmured. "I'm so neglectful."

I felt—I saw—that I was on the right track at last. "When will you go?" I persisted. "Next Sunday?"

"Perhaps," said she faintly.

"Yes, we'll go Sunday. They fret because you never write."

"They are well?"

"In splendid health. There's no reason why all four of them shouldn't outlive us."

"You—you go often?" she faltered.

"I haven't been for some time," said I. "You see, I've been away. . . . If we opened the house, we could have them visit us. That would make up to them for the way we've acted."

She gazed at me in large-eyed horror. Suddenly she smiled with patient scorn and shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I had forgotten your passion for jesting."

"I am in earnest," said I—and I was indeed in the full flood of a virtuous penitence whose hypocrisy I did not detect until I was thinking about the matter afterwards. You, gentle reader, would in the same circumstances never have permitted yourself to discover the

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

hypocrisy. I went on: "I'm ashamed of the way I've acted."

"They've got everything they need or want," said Edna.

"Material comfort," replied I. "But haven't parents a right to expect something more? And now that our social position is secure, we've no excuse for acting snobbishly."

I enjoyed this virtuous talk for itself; still more, I enjoyed teasing her. Her delicate, refined, ladylike nerves were aristocratically sensitive. Have you observed that peculiarity of lady nerves? A lady will live with the most shocking husband for luxury. She will endure the most degrading humiliations to get dresses, jewels, motor cars. She will crawl in the dirt to gain or to improve social position. She will, without a quiver, kiss her worst enemy, cut her dearest friends, in the furtherance of any ladylike purpose. But talk to her of self-respecting independence, of earning her own living, or of any of the homely decencies of life—of her ignorant old parents or unsightly poor relatives—and what a fairy princess of high-strung nerves she straightway becomes. Yes, Edna was a lady—a perfect lady, as perfect as if she had been born to it.

To my surprise I had daunted her only for the day; the following afternoon she began again. "This heavenly weather!" she exclaimed. "It tempts me to stay on and on."

"I hope it will last over Sunday," said I.

She ignored the shaft, and went on with undiminished enthusiasm: "And really New York has improved.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

In some respects it can be compared to Paris—though, of course, it has no background. A city can be built in a generation or so. But to build up the country—that takes centuries.”

“It’s building up rapidly,” said I. “You’ll be astonished Sunday by the change down where the old folks are. The Fosdicks have bought up twenty farms or so, and are making a park. I saw Amy Siersdorf not long ago and she spoke of having stopped at father’s place and got milk and corn bread.”

“The fluffy little cat,” said Edna, not especially ruffled. “I shall snub her the first time we meet. But I was about to speak of our house. I am arranging to open it. Of course, Margot can’t come over *this* winter, but I don’t really need her. We owe it to our friends here to do something socially. I want to stop the gossip.”

“The gossip?” said I.

“The talk because we are not living together. It isn’t dangerous, but it’s uncomfortable. I believe people like us ought to maintain the best social traditions—ought to set a good example to the lower classes.”

“Oh, bother!” said I as good-humoredly as I could. “We’ll do as we please. Otherwise, where’s the use in having money?”

A pause which I felt was hopeful. Edna said with affected carelessness: “You don’t think people have a right to—to divorce?”

At last! My intuition had been correct! “Why not?” replied I, my tone as casual as hers. “Certainly, if they wish.”

A long silence. Then she: “Sometimes I feel that

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

way myself. When two people find that they're uncongenial, that they'd be better off—happier—if free to go their separate ways and to realize to the full their own ideals of life— Why not? ”

“ Precisely my view,” said I.

Again a long silence. She finally said: “ Has it ever occurred to you, Godfrey, that you and I might be better off—apart? ”

I laughed. “ It's a good many years now since we were together,” replied I. “ We might as well be divorced as living the way we do.”

“ It's because I've been feeling those very things, that I've come back,” said she. “ It seemed to me that, now I've fulfilled my duty to Margot, I ought to do my duty to you.”

“ That's like you,” said I. “ For you life is one long sacrifice.”

If she scented irony she dissembled well. “ Sacrifice is the woman's part,” replied she sweetly.

“ No doubt,” I went on, “ you're willing to stay here where you're unhappy, and for my sake to jam the house night after night with people you care nothing about, and disport yourself in splendor to make the world envy me. I appreciate your nobility of character, but I positively can't allow it.”

“ We must do our duty,” said she. “ Society expects certain things of us, and we must do them.”

“ Not I, my dear. Open the house if you like. But I stick to my bachelor apartment.”

“ Do you want me to go back to Europe? ” said she with a fine show of quiet melancholy.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I want you to do as you please," was my answer.

"But unless I stay here, and you and I take our place in society together, I—" She hesitated. "Now that Margot is settled," she went on desperately, "I am adrift. And—Godfrey, we *can't* go on as we are."

"I see that," said I. "What do you propose?"

"To stay in New York," replied she, with the promptness of the skilled fencer. "To stay here and be the mistress of your establishment."

"My establishment is an apartment at Sherry's."

"But that's impossible!" remonstrated she.

"Be calm, my dear. I don't ask you to lead my kind of life."

"Then—what do you propose?" ventured she.

I shrugged my shoulders and settled myself more comfortably in her luxurious motor. I gazed with absorbed interest at the bunch of orchids in the flower-holder.

"I don't see how we can continue neither free nor bound," pursued she.

"Whatever you like," said I. "Only—no fashionable capering for me."

"Do you want me to get a divorce, Godfrey?" said she.

"I want you to be happy," said I. "Divorce has no terrors for me. Aren't we practically divorced already?"

"That's true," said she. "We never did have much in common." Then she reddened—for, she could not quite forget those first days of our married life, before I got the money to feed her ambition. "You make me



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

feel as if you were a—no, not a stranger, but only a friend.”

“And we *are* friends,” said I heartily. “And always shall be.” For I was beginning to like her, to take the amiably indifferent outsider’s view of her, now that she was freeing me.

“Godfrey, do you want to marry again?” she asked with a sudden shrewd look straight into my eyes.

I laughed easily. “That question might better come from me,” said I. “You will never be happy, I suppose, until you are the Duchess or Princess Something-or-other.”

A flush stole over her small sweet face, making it lovelier than ever. “I never thought of such a thing,” she protested—but too energetically.

“Nonsense,” said I. “You’ve dreamed it for years. Be honest with me, Edna.”

“How could I dream it?” replied she. “It would take an awful lot of money.”

“You have quite a bunch,” said I. “And if we parted, naturally I’d give you more.”

Once again—but this time slowly—the searching gaze turned upon me.

I bore it well. “You can’t live as I live,” I went on. “I won’t live as you live. You say that means divorce. I don’t think so. Many rich American couples live apart without divorce. I believe usually the reason is the wife has found she couldn’t get a large enough slice of the husband’s fortune, if she divorced him. Still, for whatever reason, they stay married. You don’t like the idea. So I say, if you want to go I’ll give you as much as

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I gave Margot—in addition to what you already have—and my blessing. I've some sentiment about the past, but it is as a past."

"I am—stunned," said she. And I think her vanity was.

"It's what you want?" rejoined I.

"You put me in a hard position, Godfrey. You give me no alternative but to accept."

"I am a hard man," said I suavely.

"You are really willing to let me go?"

"You expected to have a difficult time persuading me?" laughed I.

She looked at me reproachfully. "Do be serious, Godfrey, about these serious things."

"All right. What do you say, Edna? Yes or no?"

"I must have time to think," replied she. "This is a very solemn moment."

"Why fake?" said I pleasantly. "You have it all thought out."

"It is solemn to *me*, Godfrey."

"There's nothing solemn about our married life. It's a farce."

But she was searching for confirmation of her fear of some kind of trap. "You really mean that you wish to free me?" she said.

"I mean precisely what I say," replied I. "Freedom and the cash are yours for the asking. But you must ask, my dear. I'll not have any more of your favorite comedy of making yourself out a martyr."

"You don't know how you hurt me," cried she.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"But you always have hurt me—always. I know—" very gently—"that you didn't mean to, but you haven't understood."

"I did my best," said I, with the pleasant smile of which she was so intolerant. "But what can be expected of a plain, coarse materialist of a business man?"

"Yet you are generous in many ways," mused she. "It's simply that you can't understand me."

"Perhaps it's *you* that don't understand *me*," said I.

"What do you mean?" inquired she.

"Oh, nothing," I replied carelessly. How hope to make a vain woman, obsessed of the notion that she has a profound and mysterious soul when she simply has a fog-bank—how hope to make her see the truth about herself? "It isn't worth explaining. Only—when you are free and you find some one who appreciates and sympathizes with that soul of yours, be careful to pay him well, and to keep on paying. You can always be flattered and fooled, if you pay for it. But if you don't pay— Look out. You may hear the truth."

"What a cynic you are!" she cried. "Thank God, I haven't your low views of life."

"Keep your views, by all means," said I. "But don't forget my advice. You are lovely. You are charming. You dress beautifully and have good taste. But it's the money, my dear, that causes the excitement about those charms and graces. Hold on to your principal, and spend your income freely but judiciously."

"If I could only convince you that there is something beside money in the world."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

“Not for those to whom money is the breath of life,” replied I.

When we returned to her hotel she urged me to come in for tea. We went into the greenroom, to listen to the music and to observe the crowds. There was a sprinkling of men, but two thirds were women—women of all classes and conditions, above the working class. Women obviously fashionable as well as rich. Women obviously only rich. Women living off men respectably. Women “trimming” here and there. An army of pretty women—well-cared-for bodies, attractive faces, inviting the various kinds of sensual attack from the subtlest to the frankest. This woman at the next table is rather cheaply dressed, except a gorgeous hat. That woman yonder has contrived to “trim” only a handsome set of furs; it looks grotesque with the rest of the costume. A third has a huge gilt bag as her sole claim to sisterhood with the throng of fair pampered parasites upon husbands, fathers, lovers. A charming and a useless throng. No, not charming, unless a man happens to be in the mood in which he succumbs to the trimming process with pleasure—and then, he would not think them altogether useless.

“New York grows more and more like Europe,” said my wife, gazing around with shining eyes, and inhaling the heavily scented atmosphere with dilating nostrils. “More and more like Europe.”

“More and more,” replied I. “Especially the women.”

“Oh, they’re ahead of the European women,” said she.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"So they are," said I. "Yes—they beat the European women at it. But I'm not sure whether that's because they are really cleverer, or merely because our men trim more readily."

She regarded me with an expression of mildly interested perplexity, as if she couldn't imagine what was the "it" I was talking about. "You must admit they are lovely," said she.

"Admit it?" said I. "I proclaim it. If a man's notion of dinner is only the dessert, he couldn't do better."

She looked still more vague—one of her tricks when she wished to avoid or to ignore. "I never touch deserts," said she.

As I was leaving—for we were not dining together that evening—she said:

"I shall think about your proposal."

I looked straight at her. "Tell me whether you will or will not confirm your own proposal," said I. "And don't delay too long. Unfinished business makes me nervous."

She returned my look with quiet composure. "I shall let you know to-morrow," said she.

## X

AMONG my acquaintances, both in and out of fashionable society, there were not a few jealous husbands. I knew one man who, in the evening, made his wife account for every moment of the day, and tell him in detail how she was going to spend the following day, and during business hours he called up irregularly on the telephone. He was not content with the effective system of espionage which a retinue of servants automatically establishes. Another man—to give a typical instance of each of the two types—hired detectives from time to time to watch his wife living abroad “for her health and to educate her children.” In a decently ordered society this sort of jealousy is rare. Only where the women are luxuriously supported parasites and the men are attaching but the one value to the women—the only value they possess for them—only there do you find this defiling jealousy the rule instead of the exception. Naturally, if the woman is mere property the man guards her as he guards the rest of his material possessions; and the woman who consents to be mere property probably needs guarding if she has qualities of desirability discoverable by other eyes than those of her overprizing owner.

This jealousy was in the air of the offices and clubs

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I frequented. But it had somehow or other never infected me. Was I occupied too deeply with other matters? Was I indifferent? Did my own disinclination to dalliance make me slow to appreciate the large part dalliance now plays in American life? I do not know why I was free from jealousy. I only know that never once had my mind been shadowed by a sinister thought as to what my wife might be about, far away and free. Possibly my knowledge of her absorption in social ambition kept me quiet. Certainly a woman whose whole mind and heart are set upon social climbing is about the last person a seeker for dalliance would invest.

I had never heard a word or a hint of a scandal about her—for the best of reasons; she did nothing to cause that kind of talk. But, how curious is coincidence! On the very evening of the day of our divorce discussion Edna had her first experience of scandal, and I immediately knew of it. After leaving her I went to the Federal Club, where I often took a hand in a rather stiff game of bridge before dinner. I drifted into the reading room, glanced idly at the long row of current magazines. In full view lay the weekly purveyor of social news, a paper I had not looked at half a dozen times in my life, and then only because some one had asked me to read a particular paragraph. The week's issue of this scandal monger had just come in. I threw back the cover, let my glance drop upon the page. I was hardly aware that I was reading—for my thoughts were elsewhere—when I became vaguely conscious that the print had some relation to me. I reread it; it was a veiled attack upon Edna. All unsuspected by her husband—so the story

ran—she had come to America to divorce him that she might marry a German nobleman of almost royal rank. A voice close beside me said:

“What is it amuses you so in that dirty sheet?”

It was Armitage. I started guiltily. Then my common sense asserted itself, and I pointed to the paragraph. When he had read it I said:

“Who’s the German? I’m not well enough up on the nobility to be able to guess, though it’s probably plainly told.”

“The Count von Biestrich,” said he.

“Thanks,” said I, no wiser than before, and we went up to play bridge.

A year or so before I might possibly have talked freely with Armitage; but the day of our closest intimacy had passed. He was still my intimate friend; I was his—with several large reservations. Why? Chiefly because when he passed the critical age his mind took the turn for the worse. At forty to forty-five a man begins to reap his harvest. Armitage had many and varied interests, but the one that affected his nature most profoundly was women. He mocked at them; he was always inventing or relating stories about them of the more or less gamey sort. But, somewhat like his pretensions of disdain for birth and fashion, his wordy scorn of women concealed a slavish weakness for them. After forty this began to disclose itself in his features. Their handsome intellectuality began to be marred by a sensual heaviness; and presently his wit degenerated toward a repellent coarseness. It takes delicate juggling to make filth attractive. After forty a man does well to be careful



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

how he attempts it; for, after forty, the hand loses its lightness. I rather avoided Armitage; not that I was squeamish, but my sense of humor somehow rarely has responded to rude rootings and pawings in the garbage barrel.

About an hour after dinner Edna called me to the telephone and asked me to come to her. I found her in high excitement, her color vivid, her manner nervous beyond its natural vivacity even as now expanded upon the best Continental models. "I got rid of my guests," said she, "and sent for you as soon as I could. Have you heard?"

"About von Biestrich?" said I.

"It is hideous!—hideous!" she cried. "I who have kept my name unsullied—I who have——"

"I'm sure of that," I interrupted. "I'm dead tired and, if you'll excuse me, I'll go home."

She caught me by the arm. "Godfrey, you think this was what I had in mind. I swear to you——"

"I'm sure you've been all that a wife is expected to be," said I, in my usual manner of good-natured railery. "And I'm also sure you would wait until you were free, and would deliberate very carefully before deciding——"

"Godfrey, how can you!" cried she, in her most exaggerated tone for outraged spirituality. "Have you *no* heart? Have you no respect for me—your wife, the mother of your daughter?"

"Have I not said I did not suspect you?" remonstrated I. "Why so agitated, my dear? Do you wish to make me begin to suspect?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

She shrank and began to cool down. "I've never had such an experience before," she apologized. "I don't know how to take it."

"It's nothing—nothing," I declared.

"I give you my word of honor that if I were free I should not consider marrying that German."

"I believe you." I put out a friendly hand. "Good night."

"This ends all talk of divorce," said she.

I dropped my hand. "I don't see that the situation is changed in the least."

"That's because you are not a woman," replied she. "You can't appreciate how I feel."

"You wished to be free before this paragraph appeared. You still wish to be free."

"Oh, *how* can you be so insensible!" cried she, all unstrung again and, I could not but see, genuinely so. "I *never* could face the scandal of a divorce. I didn't realize. It would kill me. How *did* Hilda face it?—and all these other nice women? I should hide and never show my face again."

She was agitating me so wildly that I felt I could not much longer conceal it. "I must go," said I, pretending to yawn. "Sleep on it. Perhaps to-morrow you'll feel differently."

She tried to detain me, but I broke away and fled. To be almost free and then to have freedom snatched away! Not out of reach, but where it can be reached easily if one will simply stretch out his hand somewhat ruthlessly. By no means so ruthless as my wife had been a score of times in gaining her ends without regard

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to me. Why not be ruthless? Had she not been ruthless? Had she not given me the right to compel her to free me? More, did she not herself wish to be free? And was she not now restrained, not by consideration for me, not by any decent instinct whatsoever, but solely by a snobbish groveling fear of public opinion?—a senseless fear, too?

We are constantly criticising people—by way of patting ourselves on the back—because they take what they want regardless of the feelings of others. A form of self-righteousness as shameless as common; for we happen not to fancy the things they show themselves inconsiderate and swinish about. But—when we really do want a thing—what then? How industrious we become in appeal to conscience—that most perfect of courtiers—to show us how just and right it is that we should have this thing *we* want! Having set myself drastically to cure self-fooling years before—when first I realized how dangerous it is and how common a cause of failure and ruin—I was unable to conceal from myself the cruelty of forcing Edna to divorce me. My conscience—as sly a sophist and flatterer as yours, gentle reader—my conscience could not convince me. Cruel things I had never done—that is, not directly. Of course I, like all men of action, had again and again been compelled to do them indirectly. But not by my own direct act had I ever made any human being suffer. I would not begin now. I would not commit the stupidity of trying to found my happiness upon the wretchedness of another. I could feel the withering scorn that would blaze in Mary Kirkwood's honest eyes if I should go

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

to her after having freed myself by force, and she should find it out. I see your sarcastic smile, gentle reader, as I thus ingenuously confess the selfish fear that was the hidden spring of my virtue. Your smile betrays your shallowness. If you knew human nature you would know that all *real* motives are selfish. The differences of character in human beings are not differences between selfish and unselfish. They are differences between petty, short-sighted selfishness and broad, far-sighted selfishness.

When I saw Edna again she was still wavering. She had come to America with her mind made up for divorce, if I could by hook or by crook be induced to consent. She had been frightened by this attack upon her—frightened as only those who live a life of complete self-deception can be frightened by a sudden and public holding up of the mirror to reflect their naked selves. She was, of course, easily able to convince herself that her own motives in seeking a divorce were fine and high and self-martyring. But she could now see no way to convince others. In the public estimation she saw she would be classed with Lady Blankenship, with Mrs. Ramsdell, with all the other women who had got divorces to better themselves socially or financially.

Instead of dying out the scandal grew. The daily papers took up the hints in the society journal's veiled paragraph, had long cabled accounts of Count von Biestrich, of his attentions to Edna, told when and where they had been guests at the same châteaux and country houses, made it appear that they had been no

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

better than they should be for nearly a year. Edna was prostrated.

"There's only one answer to these attacks," she said to me. "You must give up your apartment and move to this hotel. We must open the house and live in it together and entertain together."

I was not unprepared. I had threshed out the whole matter with myself, had made my choice between the two courses open to me—or, rather, had forced myself to see the truth that there was in decency but the one course. "Very well," said I to her—and that was all.

I moved to the Plaza the same day; I was seen constantly with her; I did my best to show the world that all was serene between us. In fact, if you saw us during those scandal-clouded days you may have thought us a couple on a honeymoon. Behind the scenes we quarreled—about anything, about everything, about nothing—as people do when forced to play in public the farce of billing and cooing lovers. Especially if one of them has not the faintest glimmer of a sense of humor. But in public——

The newspapers soon had to drop their campaign of slander by insinuation.

So it came to pass that by the opening of the season Edna and I were installed in the big house, decidedly improved now thanks to the collecting both of ideas and of things she had done abroad. And we were giving all kinds of parties, with me taking part to an extent I should have laughed at beforehand as impossible. She had become so irritating to me that the mere sight of her put me in a rage. Have you ever

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

been forced into intimate daily contact with a nature that is thoroughly artificial—after you have discovered its artificiality, its lack of sincerity, its vanity and pretense and sex trickery? There is, as we all know, in everyone of us a streak of artificiality, of self-consciousness, a fondness for posing to seem better than we are. But somewhere beneath the pose there is usually a core of sincerity, a genuine individuality, perhaps a poor thing but still a real thing. It may be there was this reality somewhere in Edna. I can only say that I was never granted a sight of it. And I rather suspect that she, like most of the fashion-rotted women and men, had lost by a process of atrophy through suppression and disuse the last fragment of reality. Had Gabriel's trumpet sounded and the great light from the Throne revealed the secrets of all hearts, it would have penetrated in her to nothing but posing within posing.

I shall get no sympathy from man or woman—or fellow-beast—after talking thus of a woman and a lady. It is the convention to speak gallant lies to and about women—and to treat them as if they were beneath contempt. So my habit of treating them well and speaking the truth about them will be condemned and denounced with the triple curse. Well—I shall try to live through it.

Except in occasional outbursts when her rude candor toward me would anger me into retort in kind, I concealed my feeling about her. I knew it was just, yet I was ashamed of it. Our quarrels were all surface affairs—outbursts of irritation—the blowing off of surplus steam, not the bursting of the boiler and the wreck-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ing of the machinery. If you happen to take into your employ any of the servants we had in those days—Edna's maids or my valet or any other of the menials so placed that they could spy upon our innermost privacy—I am confident that in return for your adroit, searching questionings you will hear we were no more inharmonious than the usual married couple past the best-foot-foremost stage. I did not swear at her; she did not throw bric-à-brac at me. And once, I remember, when I had a bad headache she stayed home from the opera—on a Monday night, too—to read to me. It is true the new dress in which she had expected to show herself was not ready. But that is a detail for a cynic to linger upon.

Three months of New York, and she was bored to extinction. I had confidently been expecting this. I watched the signs of it with gnawing anxiety, for I was very near to the end of my good behavior. If possible I wished to stay on and help her toward a rational frame of mind—one in which she would see that divorce was the only possible solution of our impossible situation. But I began to fear I should have to give up and fly—to hunt or to inspect western mines and railways. She was bored by the women; they seemed shallow dabblers in culture after the European women. She was offended by their nervousness about their position; it made them seem common in contrast with the Europeans, born swells and impregvably ensconced. She was bored by the men—by their fewness, by the insufferable dullness of those few—all of them feeble imitations of the European type of elegant loafer.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"These men have no subtlety," she cried. "They have no conversation. When they're alone with a woman—you should hear them try to flatter. They are as different from the European men as—as——"

"As a fence-painter from an artist," I suggested.

"Quite that," said she, and I saw her making a mental note of the comparison for future use—one of her best tricks. "Really, I prefer the business men to them. But one cannot get the business men. What a country, where everyone who has any brains is at work!"

"If you are unhappy here, why not go abroad?" said I amiably. "Margot is always waiting for you."

"But how *can* I go abroad?" railed she. "There'll be another outbreak of scandal. Was ever a woman so wretchedly placed! What *shall* I do! If I had some one to advise me!"

It was interesting to hear her, determined, self-reliant character though she was, thus confess to the universal weakness of the female sex. Women, not trained to act for themselves, can hardly overcome this fundamental defect. That is why you so often see an apparently, and probably, superior woman weaken and yield where a distinctly ordinary man would be strong and would march ahead. The trouble with Edna was that she had no definite man behind her, spurring her on to action. In all she had done from the beginning of our married life she had felt that she had me to fall back on, should emergency arise—an unconscious dependence, one she would have scornfully denied, but none



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

the less real. In this affair there was no man to fall back on.

I saw this. Yet I refrained from giving her the support she needed and all but asked. Her cry, "If I had some one to advise me," meant, "If I had some one to give me the courage to act." I knew what it meant. But eager though I was to be quit of her, I would not give her the thrust toward divorce that would have put into her the courage of anger and of the feeling that she was a martyr to my brutality. Why did I hold myself in check? Candidly, I do not know. I distrust the suggestion that it may have been due to essential goodness of heart. At any rate, I did restrain myself. She—naturally enough—misunderstood; and she proceeded to explain it to the gratifying of her vanity. I saw in her eyes, in her way of treating me, that she thought me her secret adorer, convinced of my unworthiness, of her god-to-mortal superiority; not daring openly to resist her desire to be free from me, but opposing it humbly, silently. I saw that she pitied me. Did this add to my anger? Not in the least. I have a perhaps queer sense of humor. I rather welcomed the chance to get a little amusement out of a situation otherwise dreary and infuriating.

Curiously enough, it was Armitage who came to her rescue—and to mine.

Bob had been in retirement several weeks, having himself rejuvenated by a beauty doctor. You are astonished, gentle reader, perhaps incredulous, that a man of his position—high both socially and financially—should stoop to such triviality—not a woman but a

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

man. And the serious, masculine sort of man he was, I assure you. But you, being a confirmed acceptor of the trash written and talked about human nature, do not appreciate what a power physical vanity is in the world. Of course; if you are a man, you know about your own carefully hid physical vanity. But you think it in yourself a virtue, quite natural, not a vanity at all. Bob Armitage was not vain enough to fail to see the beginning of the ravages of time and dissipation. Another man would have looked in the glass and would have seen a reflection ever handsomer as the years went by, would have discovered in the creases and crow's-feet and lengthening wattles a superb beauty of manly strength of character showing at last in the face. Bob was not that sort of fool. He wished to fascinate the ladies; so, he strove to retain the fair insignia of youth as long as he possibly could. He knew as well as the next man that his wealth had value with the women far beyond any degree of beauty or charm. But like most men he wished to feel that he was at least not a "winner" in spite of his personal self; and his young good looks even helped toward the pleasantest of delusions—that he was loved for himself chiefly.

The beauty doctor did well by him, I must say. He looked ten years younger, would have passed in artificial light for a youth of thirty or thereabouts. He reappeared in his haunts, freshened up mentally, too; for physical content reacts powerfully upon the mind, and while it is true that feeling young helps one to look young, it is truer that looking young compels one to feel young.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

With him came a Prince Frascatonì, head of one of the great families of Italy, one of the few that have retained German titles and estates from the days of the Holy Roman Empire. Frascatonì was sufficiently rich for all ordinary purposes, and could therefore pose as a traveler for pleasure with no matrimonial designs. He was, in fact, poor for a *grand seigneur* and was on the same business in America that has attracted here every other visiting foreigner of rank—except those who come for political purposes, and those who come to shoot in the West. And those classes give our fashionable society as wide a berth as they would its middle-class prototype in their home countries.

The first time I saw Frascatonì—when he and Armitage strolled into the reading room of the Federal Club together—I thought him about the handsomest and, in a certain way, the most distinguished-looking man I had ever seen. He was a black Italian—dark olive skin, coal-black hair, dark-gray eyes that seemed black or brown at a glance. They were weary-looking eyes; they gazed at you with the ineffable dreamy satiric repose of a sphinx who has seen the futile human procession march into the grave for countless centuries. He had a slow sweet smile, a manner made superior by the effacement of every trace of superiority. He had the quiet, leisurely voice of one used to being listened to attentively.

“Loring—the Prince Frascatonì. Prince, I particularly wish you to know my friend Godfrey Loring. Don’t be deceived by his look of the honest simple

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

youth into thinking him either young or unsophisticated."

The prince gave me his hand. As it had also been my habit ever since I learned the valuable trick merely to give my hand, the gesture was a draw. Neither had trapped the other into making an advance. We talked commonplaces of New York sky line, American energy and business enthusiasm for perhaps half an hour. Then we three and some one else, a professional cultivator of millionaires named Chassory, I believe, played bridge and afterwards dined together. It came out sometime during the evening that Frascatoni had met my wife in Rome and in Paris, and that he knew my son-in-law—not surprising, as the fashionable set is international, and is small enough to be acquainted all round.

Armitage must have told him that my wife and I were not altogether inconsolable if we did not see too much of each other. For, the prince, taking Edna in to dinner a few nights later, laid siege at once. I recall noting how he would talk to her in his quiet, leisurely way until she looked at him; then, how his weary eyes would suddenly light up with interest—not with ardor—nothing so banal as that—but a fleeting gleam of interest that was more flattering than the ardor of another man would have been. As Frascatoni, an unusual type, attracted me, I saved myself from boredom by observing him all evening. And it was highly instructive in the art of winning—whether women or men—to see how he led her on to try to make that fascinating fugitive gleam reappear in his eyes. I afterwards

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

discovered that he accompanied the gleam with a peculiar veiled caress of inflection in his calm, even voice—a trick that doubly reënforced the flattery of the gleam.

“What a charming man Prince Frascatoni is,” said my wife, when our guests were gone.

“Very,” said I. “If I were writing a novel I’d make him the hero—or the villain.”

“He is one of the greatest nobles in Europe.”

“He looks it and acts it,” said I.

“Why, I thought him very simple and natural,” protested she.

“Exactly,” said I. “So many of the nobles I’ve met looked and acted like frauds. They seemed afraid it wouldn’t be known that they were of the aristocracy.”

“You are prejudiced,” said Edna.

“Then why do I size up Frascatoni so well?”

“You happen to like him.”

“But I don’t,” replied I.

“Of course not,” said Edna with sarcasm. “He isn’t in business.”

“Precisely,” I answered. “He couldn’t do anything—build a railroad, run a factory, write a book, paint a picture. He and his kind are simply amateurs at life, and their pretense that they could be professionals if they chose ought to deceive nobody. He probably could ride a horse a little worse than a professional jockey, or handle a foil almost as well as a fencing master, or play on the piano or the violin passably. I don’t admire that sort of people, and I can’t like where I don’t admire.”

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Edna yawned and prepared to go up to her own rooms. "I hope he'll stay a while," said she. "And I hope he'll let me see something of him. He's the first ray of interest I've had this winter."

"You will see something of him," said I. "He liked you."

"You think so?" said she, seating herself on the arm of a chair.

"I know it. Unless he finds what he's looking for, he'll attach himself to you."

"What is he looking for?"

"A very rich wife," said I. "But she must be attractive as well as rich, Armitage tells me. Frascatoni doesn't need money badly enough to annex a frump. And Armitage says that while Englishmen and Germans and the heiress-hunting sort of French don't care a rap what the lady looks like, the Italians—of the old families—are rather particular—not exacting, but particular. Unless, of course, the fortune is huge."

Edna yawned again. That sort of talk either irritated or bored her.

Frascatoni was constantly with her thenceforth—not pointedly or scandalously so; there are discreet ways of doing those things, and of discretion in all its forms the Italian was a supreme master. The game of man and woman had been his especial game from precocious and maddeningly handsome boyhood. He had learned both by being conquered and by conquering. They say—and I believe it—that of all the foreigners a clean Italian nobleman is the most fascinating.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

The Hungarian or Russian is a wild, barbaric love-maker, the German a wordy sentimentalist, the Englishman dominates and absorbs, the Frenchman knows how to flatter the most subtly, how to make the woman feel that life with him would be full of interest and charm. But the right sort of Italian combines the best of all these qualities, and adds to them the allure of the unfathomably mysterious. He constantly satisfies yet always baffles. He reveals himself, only to disclose in the inner wall of what seemed to be his innermost self a strangely carved door ajar.

My first intimation of what Frascatoni was about came from my wife. Not words, of course, but actions. She abruptly ceased quarreling, rebuking, reproaching, scoffing. She soothed, sympathized, agreed. She became as sweet as she had formerly been. I was puzzled, and waited for light. It came with her next move. She began to talk of going back to Europe, to deplore that scandal mongers would not let her. She began to chaff me on my love of a bachelor's life, on my dislike of married life. She said with reproachful, yet smiling gentleness, that I made her feel ashamed to stay on.

"Admit," said she, "that you'd be better pleased if I were in Guinea."

"You oughtn't have given me so many years of freedom," said I.

"You'd have been glad if I had gone on and gotten a divorce," pursued she.

My drowsing soul startled and listened. "I was willing that you should do as you liked," said I. "Di-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

voiced is a matter of more importance to the woman than to the man—just as marriage is.”

“And it’s a sensible thing, too—isn’t it?”

“Very,” said I.

“Godfrey, would you honestly be willing?”

“I’d not lay a straw in your way.”

“What nonsense we’re talking!” cried she, with a nervous laugh. “And yet there’s no denying that we don’t get on together. I see how trying it is to you to have me about.”

“And you want to be free and living abroad.”

“I wonder how much I’d really mind the scandal,” pursued she. “I don’t care especially about these New York people. And at the worst what harm could they do *me*?”

“None,” said I.

“They could only talk. How they’d blame me!”

“Behind your back, perhaps,” said I. “Unless they thought I was to blame—which is more likely.”

“You talk of divorce as if it were nothing.”

“It’s merely a means to an end,” said I. “You’ve got only the one life, you know.”

“And I’m no longer so *dreadfully* young. Though, I heard that Armitage said the other day he would never dream I was over twenty-eight if he didn’t know.”

She laughed with the pleasure we all take in a compliment that is genuine; for she knew as well as did Armitage that she could pass for twenty-eight—and a radiant twenty-eight—even in her least lovely hour.

“No one has youth to waste,” observed I. “In your heart you wish to be free—don’t you?”



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"We are not suited to each other, Godfrey," said she with gentle friendliness.

"There's not a doubt of that," said I.

"Why should we spoil each other's lives? I conceal it from you, but I am *so* unhappy here."

"You can't blame *me*," said I. "I'm not detaining you."

A long silence, then she said: "Suppose I were to consent—" I laughed, she reddened, corrected herself: "Suppose we were to decide to do it—what then?"

"Why—a divorce," said I.

"Can't those things be done quietly?"

"Certainly. No publicity until the decree is entered and the papers sealed."

"Does that mean no scandal beyond just the fact?"

"No scandal at all. Just the fact, and some newspaper comment."

"And we needn't be here."

"Not then."

"Would it take long?"

I reflected. "Let me see—if you begin action say within a month, the divorce would take— I could have it pushed through in another month or so, and then—by next fall you'd be free."

"But doesn't one have to have grounds for divorce, beside not wanting to be married?"

"All that easily arranges itself," said I.

She lapsed into a deep study, I furtively watching her. I saw an expression of fright, at the daring of her thoughts, gather—fright, yet fascination, too. Said she in a low voice: "Godfrey, are you *serious*?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Entirely so," was my careless reply. "Aren't you?"

"I don't know whether I am or not. . . . I am *wretched* here!"

"All you have to do is to say the word. We don't in the least need each other, and mutual need is the only respectable excuse for marriage. And I must tell you, I'll not stand for any more of this social nonsense that compels me to participate. I'm done."

She looked at me pityingly. Our season had been a brilliant success, yet I remained unconverted, coarsely unsympathetic. "If I should decide to—to do it—what then?"

"Nothing. I'd go away. The rest would be for the lawyers."

She looked at me dazedly. "I'll see—I'll see," she said, and went to her own part of the house.

A week passed. Frascatoni sailed for home, sending by her his polite regrets at not having seen me before his departure. I waited, confident. I knew she had a definite goal at last, and, therefore, a definite purpose. Aside from the danger of frightening her back by showing my own eagerness there was the matter of property. I was willing to pay a good round price for freedom. I have always hated money wrangles; I had never had one with her, and I did not purpose to have. On the other hand, that is, on her side, she would have given me short shrift had it not been that she wished a slice of my fortune—and a generous slice—to add to her own. I've not a doubt that the fierce social campaign she put me through that winter was not so much for her own pleas-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ure, though she delighted in it, as for goading me to demand a divorce, and, so, enable her to ease her conscience and to drive a better bargain.

My seeming indifference, combined with her now trembling eagerness to be free and away, soon forced her hand. The break came on a Sunday afternoon. Life is so inartistic—that is, from the standpoint of the cheap novelists and playwrights with their dramatic claptrap. Here is how the grand crash was precipitated:

Said I: "Well, I'm off for a few weeks' fishing."

"You're not starting now?" said she.

"Day after to-morrow," said I.

"But I've made several engagements for you."

"Get a substitute," said I. "No one will miss me."

"How inconsiderate you are!"

"That's pretty good—after all I've borne this winter."

"You are insufferable!" cried she.

"Then—why suffer me?" said I coolly.

"If you torture me much further, I won't," retorted she.

"I think I'll clear out to-night," said I.

"With people coming to dinner to-morrow! A big dinner!"

"Yes—to-night," said I. "I had forgotten to-morrow's horrors."

"If I were free!"

"That's easy."

"Yes—I *will* be free!"

"I'll send you a lawyer at eleven to-morrow morning."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

She was pale and trembling. The quarrel was a mere pretense—a pretext so flimsy that each knew the other was not deceived by it. Her tones of anger, my tones of abrupt and contemptuous indifference were obviously false and forced. As I left the room I cast a furtive glance at her, saw that her daring was so terrifying her that she could hardly keep a plausible front of haughty anger.

It was several hours before I could get away from the house, though I made all haste. Every moment I expected some word from her. But none came. I sent the lawyer the following morning. I was surprised when later in the day, by the necessary roundabout way, I learned that she had actually consented.

She showed that she had made an exhaustive study of the subject, like the wise campaigner she was. She thoroughly understood how to proceed; for, she told her lawyer—the one of my lawyers whom I assigned to her—that my coldness to her had filled her with suspicion and that she wished detectives employed. She needed no coaching whatever; he found her prepared on every point.

How far had matters gone between her and Frascatoni? Not so far as you imagine; but perhaps farther than I think. Both the husband and the world are poor judges in those affairs.

I shall pass over the suit. It was commonplace throughout. There has been much speculation as to the person named by my wife in the sealed papers. I can truthfully say that I know as little about that person

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

as does the public. It is usually so, I believe, in these arranged suits. I did not appear at any of the hearings, all of them held secretly. Nor did Edna appear, though I believe that, to comply with the forms of law, she made some sort of deposition in the presence of the lawyers for both sides. It so happened that the first and only public step—the judge's ordering of the decree of divorce—was published on the same day with the news of a big prize fight, a sensational murder, and a terrific earthquake. So, we got off with little public attention. At the time the law provided that a decree should not become valid for six months. We were nominally free; but actually neither could marry again for six months and meanwhile either of us could reopen the case—and she could by merely requesting put an end to it and restore her status as my wife. So, I was free—unless Edna should change her mind sometime within the six months.

Edna was in London and I in Paris when the news came. Curiously enough, as I stood in the doorway of the Ritz restaurant, that evening, looking about for a table where I could dine alone, in came Prince Frascatoni with another Italian whose name I cannot recall. I bowed to Frascatoni. He said:

“You are alone, sir?”

“Unluckily, yes,” replied I.

He introduced his companion and suggested that we three dine at the same table. “Why not share our dinner?” said he. “I can easily change my order. Perhaps you will go with us afterwards to some amusing little plays in a Montmartre theater?”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I accepted the courteous invitation. The situation appealed to my sense of humor. Also I knew that Edna—toward whom I now felt most kindly—would be delighted to read in the papers: "Prince Frascatoni had as his guest at dinner last night Mr. Godfrey Loring." It would put an immediate stop to any tendency to gossip. As the prince did not speak of my former wife I assumed that he had heard the news.

When we were separating I said: "You will dine with me to-morrow night?"

"Unfortunately I'm leaving town in the morning," said he.

I thought I could guess which way he was journeying. With perhaps a twinkle in my eyes, I said: "So soon? Well—thank you, and good-by—and good luck."

I thought I saw a sardonic smile flit over his face. He probably imagined I was in the dark as to his maneuverings and designs and smiled to himself as he thought, "How differently this American would be treating me if he knew!" Do not fancy, because Edna had no charm for me, I thought it strange she should have charm for other men. Nothing could be further from the truth. I appreciated her attractive points perhaps more than any other man possibly could. Also, I appreciated—and still appreciate—that another man would not be so peculiarly annoyed by her lack of any sense of humor as I was. Indeed, had not circumstances forced me into the acutely critical mood toward her, I doubt not I could have continued to bear with that lack, though it made conversation with her all but impossible and precipitated quarrels without number.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Beyond question the strongest and most enduring hold a man can get upon a woman or a woman upon a man is the physical. We—even the least intellectual of us—are something more than physical; but the physical must be contented first, and must remain contented, because we are first of all physical. The physical is the fundamental; but it takes more than foundations to make a house. And a marriage such as ours was could not endure. Each of us had but the one charm for the other. It wore itself out like a fire that is not supplied with fuel.

If I had not fallen in love with another woman, there might have remained a feeling for Edna that would have made me jealous, perhaps domineering toward her. As it was, I viewed her calmly; when I said “good luck” to Frascatoni, I meant it. I hoped he would make Edna happy, for, I wished her well.

Through Armitage I had provided myself with Mary Kirkwood’s address—an apartment overlooking the Parc Monceau which she and Neva Armstrong had taken for the spring months. That very afternoon I went to leave cards. As I feared she was not at home. “But,” said Mrs. Armstrong, “you may find her walking in the park with Hartley Beechman.”

“Oh, is he here?” said I.

“Naturally,” replied she.

You may picture me as suddenly dashed down by this word whose meaning there was no mistaking. If so, you have discovered little about me in these pages. Life had made me a competent judge of the situation that is really hopeless, the situation where to struggle is folly, and that situation which seems hopeless to the small of earth,

accustomed to defeat in their desires, but seems only difficult to the other sort of human beings.

"He has taken a studio over in the Latin quarter," continued Mrs. Armstrong. "We are all going back together in July."

Mrs. Armstrong is an attractive woman—singularly so for one who is obviously wholly absorbed in her husband. She has the sort of personality her paintings prepare you to expect. But I had difficulty in concealing my impatience to get away. I strolled several times through the park, which is not large, before I finally came upon Mary and Beechman seated in one of the less-frequented paths. As I was moving directly toward them, both saw me at the same instant. Her welcoming smile was radiant. I did not notice his, but I assume it was more reserved.

Never had I seen her looking so well. You may say what you please, but an American woman who knows how to dress, in touch with a French dressmaker who is rather artist than dressmaker, is the supreme combination for æsthetic beauty. Mrs. Kirkwood, of the ivory skin and the coal-black hair, was a thrilling sight to see in her white dress and big black hat, with that background of fresh spring foliage and late afternoon light. Her eyes and her smile, I noted for the first time, had somewhat the same quality as Frascatoni's—the weary eyes, the slow sweet smile.

"Mr. Loring!" she cried, rising and extending her hand impulsively. "I thought I was never to see you again."

I hid my emotion and greeted her, then Beechman, in



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

my habitual manner which, they tell me, is the reverse of effusive. I suppose, when I am deeply moved, its lack of cordiality becomes even more pronounced. After a few minutes of the talk necessary among acquaintances who have not met in a long time Beechman rose.

"You and Beechman will dine with me, I hope?" I said. "Mrs. Armstrong says she will go if you can."

It was arranged and, as the day was warm, d'Armenonville was fixed upon as the place. "Until half past eight," said Beechman as he left. Mary and I sat silent watching him walk away. A superb figure of young manhood, supremely fortunate in that his body was an adequate expression of a strong and simple nature.

As he passed from view at the turn of the walk I transferred my gaze to her. Her eyes slowly lowered, and a faint flush came into her cheeks. Said I:

"You saw the news—about me?"

"Hartley and I were talking of it as you appeared."

"You were not surprised?"

"Yes—and no," replied she, with constraint and some confusion. "A year or so ago I—people thought—you and she had—had drifted apart. Then it looked as though you had come together again. It seemed the natural thing. She is beautiful and has so much charm."

"She was unhappy in America. She wished to be free."

Mary looked at me reflectively. "You are not—inconsolable, I see," said she with a smile of faint raillery. "My brother has often told me about you—how indifferent you are to women. Perhaps that is why you are attractive to them."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Am I?" said I. "I did not know it."

"You are terribly impersonal," she went on laughingly. "Last summer I—well, I was not—that is, not exactly—trying to flirt with you. But your absolute unconsciousness of me as a woman was often very—baffling."

I laughed. "You thought that?"

"How could I help seeing it? Why, you treated me precisely as if I were another man. Not that I didn't like it, on the whole. A woman gets tired of being always on guard." She smiled at herself. "That sounds horribly conceited. But you know what I mean. The men never lose a chance to practice. Then, too—well, if a woman has the reputation of being rich she need not flatter herself that it is her charms that do all the drawing."

"That's the supreme curse of money—it all but cuts one off from love and friendship. Fortunately it, to a great extent, takes the place of them."

"I don't like to hear you say that," said she.

"How many poor people get love and friendship?" replied I. "Isn't it the truth that there is little—very, very little—real love or friendship in the world? All I meant was that money, and the independence and comfort and the counterfeit of affection it brings, are better than nothing at all."

"Oh, I see," said she. "You are so sensible—and you don't cant. That was why I liked to talk with you. At first I thought you cynical and hard. That's the first impression plain good sense makes. We are used to hearing only shallow sentimentality."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"The unending flapdoodle," said I.

"Flapdoodle," agreed she. "Then—I began to discover that you were anything but hard—that you looked at people as they are, and liked them for themselves, not for what they pretended to be. I was beginning to trust you—to venture timidly in the direction of being my natural self—when you left."

"Well—here I am again," said I. "And we start in afresh."

She smiled with embarrassment. "Yes," she said hesitatingly. "But the circumstances have changed somewhat."

I know full well now what I should have said. I should have replied, "Yes—we are both almost free—but soon will be altogether free—I in six months, you as soon as you break your engagement." That would have been bold and intelligent—for it is always intelligent to make the issue clear at the earliest possible moment. But I did not speak. I remained silent. Why? Because as I was talking with her I was realizing that I had been deceiving myself in a curious fashion. I had been so concentratedly in love with her— Gentle reader, I see the mocking smile on your shallowly sentimental face. You are ridiculing a love that could have such restraint as mine—that could bear with Edna, could wait, could refrain from any of the familiar much-admired impetuosities and follies. You cannot understand. In this day when men no longer regard or feel their responsibilities in taking a more or less helpless woman to wife, your sense of the decencies is utterly corrupted. But let me say that no matter how ardently and romantically a man

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

may conduct himself, a woman would do well to take care how she trusts him if he has a bad or even a doubtful record as to his way of meeting his responsibilities of whatever sort. That kind of love may "listen good," but it does not "live good." However—as I was about to say when your smile interrupted me, my all-absorbing love for Mary Kirkwood had misled me into assuming, with no reason whatsoever, that she understood all, that she knew I was eager to come to her, and would come as soon as I could. You will say this was absurd. Granted. But is not a man in love always absurd? You will say it was egotistical. Granted. But is not a man in love always egotistical? It is not the realities but the delusions that keep us going; and in those long months of waiting, of hoping often against hope, I had to have a delusion to keep me going. But now, her friendly, simply friendly, way of talking to me made me see that I had her yet to win, that I could not speak out directly as I had planned. You, who probably know women well, may say that this was a mistake. Perhaps. Nevertheless *I* could not have done otherwise.

You will say that women do not know their own minds, but have to be told. I admit it. You will say my silence was timidity. I admit it. I could not talk of love to a woman until I was sure she wished to hear. I had the timidity of the man to whom woman and love are serious matters; the timidity unknown to the man who makes love to every passible female at whom he has a chance; the timidity which all women profess to approve, but which, I more than suspect, appeals only to

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the jaded palate of the woman who has long made love and passion her profession.

As Beechman was busy with a novel I had everything my own way without strategy during those following days. There are a thousand attractive places to go in and near Paris, and I was resourceful in contriving excursions for the days when there was no chance of seeing only her. Almost every day the London papers or the Paris *Herald* printed something about Edna and the brilliant season she was having in London; often not far away from her name in a list of guests was the name of Prince Frascatoni. My own activities, more Bohemian as was my taste and the taste of my friends—and I may say the taste of civilized and intelligent Paris—my activities were not recorded in the papers. I fancied they were unobserved. I was soon to be undeceived.

I wonder who the people are that write anonymous letters—and give anonymous “tips” to society journals? Every once in a while by mischance—often by my having made a remark that was misinterpreted into something malicious or low, utterly foreign to my real meaning—I have had some fellow-being suddenly unveil a noisome corner in his or her soul for confidently awaited sympathy; and I have almost literally shrunk back in my horror at the cesspool of coarseness, or at the vicious envy. Have you had that experience? No doubt scattered among us ordinary folk, neither particularly good nor particularly bad, well rather than ill-disposed and amiable, if not too severely tried or tempted—no doubt, scattered among us there are not a few of these swine souls or snake souls, hid beneath a pleasant smile and

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

fine raiment. And these are they who give off the foulness of the anonymous letters and the anonymous tip.

In one of the minor London society papers appeared this paragraph which I am sure I quote word for word:

“American Paris is much amused these beautifully fine spring days with the ardent love-making of a recently divorced railway ‘baron.’ The lady is herself a divorcee of several years standing and is supposed to be engaged to a famous young literary man who is all unaware of what is going on.”

I know of five copies of this journal that were mailed with the paragraph marked. The five were received by Edna, Margot, myself, Mary Kirkwood, and Hartley Beechman. I have often mentally gone through the list of my acquaintances in search of the person who was responsible for this thing. I have some extremely unpleasant characters in that list. But I have never been able to suspect who did it. Not improbably the guilty person is some one in other respects not a bad sort—for almost any given cut from that vast universal, human nature, contains something of everything.

I had an engagement with Mary Kirkwood to walk in the Bois and have tea the afternoon of the day this paragraph reached me. When I arrived at her apartment she came down ready to go. Her costume was so lovely and I so delighted in her that I did not immediately note the heavy circles round her eyes nor the drawn expression of her mouth. I did not dream that she knew of the paragraph. I had read it and had dis-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

missed it from my mind. The anonymous letter and the anonymous newspaper attack were old familiar stories to me, as they are to every man who attains distinction in active life. But as we drove toward the Bois I happened to catch a glimpse of her by way of the mirror in the frame of the taxi. I saw the evidence of suffering—and the wistful, weary look in her beautiful eyes.

"What is it?" said I. "You have had bad news?"

"Yes," replied she.

"Can I help?"

"Don't let's talk of it now," said she. "Wait until we are in the woods."

Soon after we passed the entrance gates we descended and rambled away over the not too even ground, along the indistinct paths under the fascinating little trees. It was a gorgeous, perfumed May day. You know the Bois—how lovely it is, how artfully it mingles the wild and the civilized, suggesting nature as a laughing nymph with tresses half bound, half free, with graceful young form half clad, half nude. We rambled on and on, and after half an hour seated ourselves where there were leaves and the slim graceful trunks on every side and the sound of falling water like the musical voice of the sunbeams.

Mary drew a long sigh. "I feel better," she said.

I looked at her. "You *are* better. You have shaken it off."

She met my gaze. "This is the last time," she said. She looked away, repeated softly, thoughtfully, "the last time."

"The last time?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"We are not going to see each other any more. It is being misunderstood."

I glanced quickly at her, and I knew she had read the paragraph. "That miserable scandal sheet!" said I. "No one sees it—and if they did why should we notice anything so ridiculous?"

She did not answer immediately. After a while she said: "Perhaps I ought not to say it, but—Hartley is sensitive. A copy of the paper got to him."

"One to me. One to you. One to him."

"No matter," said she. "The mischief is done."

"You do not give up a friend lightly," rejoined I. The time to speak was at hand; I welcomed it.

"*He* has asked me to give you up," said she simply. "And I shall do it."

"But he has no right to ask such a thing," protested I.

"Yes—he has. He and I are engaged—you knew that?"

"I imagined there was some sort of an engagement," said I, still waiting for the right opening.

"There is only one sort of engagement possible with me," replied she, with a certain gentle reproach.

"I know that," said I. "But I remember the talk we had on the yacht."

A flush overspread her paleness for a moment. Then she rose from the little rustic iron chair. "We must go," said she.

"Wait," said I. And I made a tactless, a stupid beginning: "You can't deny that you do not love him."



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

She turned coldly away and walked on, I following. "I think I'll not stop for tea," she said. "Will you hail the first taxi we meet?"

"You are offended—Mary?" I said. What a blundering fool love does make of a man!—unless he makes a fool of it.

She shook her head. "No—not offended. But when a subject comes up about which we may not talk there is nothing to do but drop it."

In my desperation I reached for the right chord and struck it. "Do you know," said I, "why I left the yacht abruptly?"

She halted, gave me a swift, frightened glance. The color flooded her face, then fled.

"Yes—that was why," said I. "And—I've come as soon as I could."

"Oh, why, why didn't you *tell* me?" cried she. Then, before I could answer, "I don't mean that. I understand." Then, with a wild look around, "*What* am I saying?"

"I've come for you, Mary," I went on. "And you are not going to rush into folly a second time—a greater folly. For—you do not love him—and you will care for me. You are right, we can't discuss him—you and him. But we can, and must, discuss you and me."

"I shall not see you again," said she, looking at me with tranquil eyes that would have daunted me had I not known her so well, understood her so well—which is only another way of saying, had I not loved her so well.

"Why have you been seeing me day after day, when you knew that I loved you——"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I did not know it," replied she. "I did not think I could move you in the least—beyond a friendly liking."

An inflection in her voice made me suddenly realize. "You came because it made you happy to come!" I cried triumphantly. I caught her hand. "You do care, Mary!"

She drew her hand away resolutely. "I shall keep my promise," she said coldly. "I wish to hear no more."

"You will not keep your promise. If necessary I'll go to him and tell him—and he'll release you."

She gave me a look that withered. "You—do a cowardly thing like that!"

"No," said I. "But *you* will ask him to release you. You have no right to marry him. And I—I love you—and must live my life with you, or—I can think of nothing more futile and empty than life without you. And your life—would it not be futile and empty, Mary, if you tried to live it without me, when we might have been together? Together!—you and I! Mary, my love!"

"Why do you say those things, Godfrey?" she cried passionately. "To make me wretched? To make it harder for me to do what I must?"

"To make it impossible for you to do what you must not. Marry a man you don't love—marry him when you love another! You'd be doing him the worst possible injury. No matter how much he loves you, he can recover from the blow of losing you. But the day to day horror of such a loveless marriage would destroy you both. He is a sensitive man. He would feel

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

it, in spite of all your efforts to pretend. You—pretend! You could not do it.”

“After what has passed between him and me—the promises we’ve exchanged—the plans we’ve made—there is no going back! I don’t wish to go back. I——”

“Mary—I love you!” I cried. “I love you—and you love me. That’s the wall between you and any other man, between me and any other woman.”

She had waved to a passing taxi. It swept into the edge of the drive. She opened the door. “You are not coming with me,” she said. “And I shall not see you again.”

I laid my hand on her arm and forced her to meet my gaze. “You are hysterical now,” I said. “But you will be calm, and——”

She gave me a cold smile—it would have deceived those who do not understand the temperaments that can conceal themselves. “I am perfectly calm, I assure you,” said she.

“As you were the first time we ever met,” said I. “You’ve no right to marry any man but me, Mary. If you did you’d be wronging yourself—me—him most of all. That’s the truth, and you will see it.”

She dragged her arm away, burst into violent sobs, sank upon the seat of the cab. I hesitated—obeyed a right instinct, closed the door, gave her address to the ignoring chauffeur, stood watching the cab whisk away. I was shaking from head to foot. But I had no fear for the outcome. I knew that I had won—that *we* had won.

## XI

ROSSITER—I believe I have mentioned the name of my new secretary—was lying in wait for me at the hotel entrance. He read me a telegram from Margot: Edna was ill, was not expected to live, begged me to come at once.

I wrote to Mary Kirkwood—a brief repetition of what I had said to her—“of what I know both your intelligence and your heart are saying to you, dear.” I told her that Edna was desperately ill and had sent for me, and that I should be back as soon as I could get away. I went on to say many things such as a man deeply in love always says. No doubt it was a commonplace letter, as sincere love letters are apt to be; but because it was from my heart I felt that, for all the shortcomings, it would go to her heart. I admit I am not a facile love-maker. I have had little practice. And I suspect, those who are facile at love-making have got their facility by making love speeches so often when they were not in earnest that they cannot but have lost all capacity to be in earnest.

Toward noon the next day Rossiter and I and my valet were set down at the little station of Kesson Wells, half an hour out from London in Surrey. We were in the midst of about as beautiful a country as I have seen. I am a narrow enough patriot not to take the most

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

favorable view of things foreign. But I must admit that no other countryside can give one the sense of sheer loveliness that one gets in certain parts of England. I am glad we have nothing like it at home; for to have it means rainy weather most of the time, and serf labor, and landlord selfishly indifferent to the misery of the poor human creatures he works and robs. Still, I try to forget the way it came in the joy of the thing itself—as you, gentle reader, forget the suffering and death of the animals that make the artistic and delicious course dinners you eat.

We were received with much ceremony at the station. My money was being exercised by those who knew how to do it. After a drive between perfumed and blossoming hedgerows and over a road as smooth and clean as a floor we came to Garton Hall, the place my son-in-law had leased until his new house should be ready. It was a modern house, as I noted with relief when we were still afar off, and while not large, was a most satisfactory embodiment of that often misused and often misunderstood word comfort. To live in the luxurious yet comfortable comfort obtainable in England only—indoors, in its steam-heated or Americanized portions—one must have English servants. I am glad we do not breed English servants in America; I am glad that when they are imported they soon cease to be the models of menial perfection they are at home. But when I am in England I revel in the English servant. To find him at his best you must see him serving in the establishment of a great noble. And my son-in-law was that; and the establishment over which Margot presided, but with

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

which she was not permitted to interfere in the smallest detail because of her utter ignorance of all the "vulgaries" of life, as became a true lady of our quaint American brand—the establishment was a combination of the best of the city with the best of the country, a skillful mingling of the most attractive features of home, club, and hotel.

My first question at the station had, of course, been as to Mrs. Loring. I was assured that her ladyship's mother was somewhat better, but still awaiting the dangerous crisis of the fever. Margot, not a whit less girlish for her maternity, met me in the doorway, and had the nurse there with the boy—the Earl of Gorse. They said he looked like me—and he did, though I do not believe they thought so. Why should they say it? I was still a young man and might marry again. I fancy the same prudent instinct prompted them to give him Godfrey as one of his four or five names. Why do I think they did not believe he looked like me? Because all of them were ashamed of everything American. In the frequent quarrels between Margot and Hugh, he never failed to use the shaft that would surely pierce the heart of her vanity and rankle there—her low American birth, in such ghastly and grotesque contrast to the illustrious descent of her husband. She had an acid tongue when it came to quarreling; she could hurl taunts about his shifts to keep up appearances before he met her that made ugly and painful marks on his hide. She had discovered, probably by gossiping with some traitor servant, that he had been flouted by a rich English girl for a chauffeur—and you may be sure she put it to

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

good use. But nothing she could say made him quiver as she quivered when he opened out on the subject of those "filthy bounders in the States."

Do not imagine, gentle reader, that my daughter was unhappily married. She would not have exchanged places with anyone but the wife of a duke; and Hugh—well, he needed the money. Nor should you think that they lived unhappily together. They saw little of each other alone; and in public they were as smiling and amiable with each other as—perhaps as you and your husband.

A fine baby was the Earl of Gorse—one who in a decent environment would have grown up a sensible, useful person. But hardly, I feared, when he was already living in his own separate apartment, with his name—"The Earl of Gorse"—on a card beside the door, and with all the servants, including his mother, treating him as if he were of superior clay. This when he barely had his sight. They say a baby learns the utility of bawling at about three days old; I should say the germ of snobbishness would get to work very soon thereafter.

You are waiting to hear what was the matter with Edna. No, it was not a fake illness to draw me within reach for some further trimming. She had indeed fallen dangerously ill—did not expect to live when Margot telegraphed me. It was an intestinal fever brought on by the excesses of the London season. I wonder when the biographers, poets, playwrights, novelists, and other gentry who give us the annals of the race will catch up with the progress of science? How long will it be be-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

fore they stop telling us of germ and filth diseases as if they were the romantic physical expressions of soul states? There was a time when such blunders were excusable. Now, science has shown us that they are so much twaddle. So, gentle reader, I cannot gratify your taste for humbug and moonshine by telling you that Edna was stricken of remorse or of overjoy or of secret grief or of any other soul state whatever. The doctor bosh was, of course, nervous exhaustion. It always is if the patient is above the working class. The truth was that she fell ill, even as you and I. She ate and drank too much, both at and between meals, and did not take proper care of herself in any way. She wore dresses that were nearly nothing in cold carriages and draughty rooms, when she was laden with undigested food. Vulgar—isn't it? Revolting for me to speak thus of a lady? But I am trying to tell the truth, gentle reader, not to increase your stock of slop and lies which you call "culture." And if a lady will put herself in such a condition, why should it not be spoken of? Why go on lying about these things, and encouraging people to attribute to sensitive nerves and souls the consequences of gluttony, ignorance, and neglect?

I am not criticising Edna for getting into such an internal physical state that a pestilence began to rage within her. The most intelligent of us is only too foolish and ignorant in these matters, thanks to stupid education from childhood up. And she has the added excuse of having been exposed to the temptations of a London season. She fell; it is hardly in human nature not to fall.



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

You have been through a London season? It is a mad chase from food to food. You rise and hastily swallow a heavy English breakfast. You ride in the Row a while, ride toward a lunch table—and an English lunch, especially in the season, means a bigger dinner than any Frenchman or other highly civilized person ever willingly sat down to. Hardly is this long lunch over before it is time for tea—which means not merely tea, but toast, and sandwiches, and hot muffins, and many kinds of heavy cake, and often fruit or jam. Tea is to give you an appetite for the dinner that follows—and what a dinner! One rich, heavy course upon another, with drenchings of wine and a poisonous liqueur afterward. You sit about until this has settled a bit, then—on to supper! Not so formidable a meal as the dinner, but still what any reasonable person would call a square meal. Then to bed? By no means. On to a ball, where you eat and drink in desultory fashion until late supper is served. You roll heavily home to sleep. But hardly have your eyes closed when you are roused to eat again. It is breakfast time, and another day of stuffing has begun.

Starvation, they tell me, is one of the regular causes of death in London. But that is in the East End. In the West End—and you, gentle reader, are interested only in that section—death, I'll wager, reaps twenty from overfeeding to one he gets in the East End through underfeeding. Famine is a dreadful thing. But how characteristic of the shallowness of human beings it is that you can make a poetic horror out of famine, when no one would listen while you told the far more horrible

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

truth of the frightful ravages of overfeeding, chief cause of all the diseases that torture and twist the human body, aging and killing it prematurely.

Edna had been for many years most cautiously careful of her health. She loved her youth, her beautiful body. She fought against her natural fondness for food and wine. I fancy that, for this first season after freedom she relaxed her rules, and turned herself loose to "celebrate." I know she must have had something of this sort in mind, because her French maid—I could not talk with the Italian—told me that madame had arranged an elaborate programme of "cures" on the Continent after the season. "And they were to be serious cures," said she.

Her illness took such a course of ups and downs, with death always hovering, that it was impossible for me to leave. I wrote Mary; I got no reply. I sent Rossiter to Paris; he reported that Mrs. Armstrong and Mrs. Kirkwood had left for the country, but that he could get no address.

You probably picture me as scarcely able to restrain myself from acting like a madman. How little you know of me! Do you think I could have achieved my solid success before I reached forty-five years if I had been one of the little people who fret and fume against the inevitable? All men who amount to anything are violent men. Jesus, the model of serenity and patience, scourged the money changers from the temple. Washington, one more great exemplar of the majesty of repose, swore like a lunatic at the battle of Monmouth. These great ones simply had in the highest form the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

virtues that make for success in every department of leadership. Certainly, I am a violent man; but I have rarely been foolish enough to go crazy to no purpose.

What could I do but wait? And over that beautiful, quiet country place floated the black cormorant, with wings outspread and hollow, burning eyes bent eagerly downward. I waited, not in fury, but oppressed by a deep melancholy. For the first time in my life I was thinking seriously of death. To any man no decisive event of life is so absolutely unimportant as his own death. I never have wasted, and never shall waste, a moment in thinking of my death. It may concern others, but how does it concern me? When it comes I shall not be there. The death of another, however—that is cause for reflection, for sadness. I knew, as did no one else, how intensely Edna loved life, how in her own way of strain and struggle she enjoyed it. And to me it was pitiful, this spectacle of her sudden arrest, her sudden mortal peril, as she was about to achieve the summit of her ambition.

I wondered as to Frascatoni. I pictured him waiting, with those tranquil, weary eyes already looking about for another means to his aim of large fortune should this means fail. There I misjudged him; for, one day as I stood in a balcony overlooking the drive he came rushing up in a motor, and my first glance at his haggard face told me that he loved her. In a way it is small compliment to a woman to be loved by the fortune-hunting sort of man; for, he does not release himself until he has the permit of basest self-interest. But

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Frascatoni, having released himself, had fallen in love with all the frenzy of his super-refined, passionately imaginative nature.

After a few minutes he drove away. I do not know what occurred—naturally, they would not speak of his call and I did not ask questions. I can imagine, however. She seemed better that day, and he must have gone away reassured. He was sending, every morning, enormous quantities of flowers; such skill and taste showed in the arranging that I am sure it was not the usual meaningless performance of rich people, who are always trying to make money-spending serve instead of thoughtful and delicate attention.

Nearly a month dragged along before she was able to see me. As I have explained, her beauty was not dependent upon evanescent charms of contour and coloring, but was securely founded in the structure of her head and face and body. So, I saw lying weakly in the bed an emaciated but lovely Edna. Instantly, on sight of her, there came flooding back to me the memory of the birth of Margot, our first child—how Edna had looked when they let me go into the humble, almost squalid little bedroom in the flat of which we were so vain. She was looking exactly so in this bed of state, in this magnificent room with the evidences of wealth and rank and fashion on every side. She smiled faintly; one of the slim weak hands lying upon the cream-white silk coverlet moved. I bent and kissed it.

“Thank you for being here,” she murmured, tears in her eyes. Her lips could scarcely utter the words.

“You must not speak, your ladyship,” warned the

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

nurse. To flatter Americans and to give themselves the comfortable feeling of gratified snobbishness English servants address us—or rather our women—as if we had titles.

“You are to get well rapidly now,” I said.

“You’ll stay until I can talk to you?”

“Yes,” I said—what else could I say?

They motioned me away. I had committed myself to several weeks more of that futile monotony—and I no longer had the restraint of the sense that she might die at any moment.

Even had I been willing to break my promise I could not have done so; for she would have me in every morning and every afternoon to look at me, and they told me that if I were not there to reassure her, it would undoubtedly cause a change for the worse. I stayed on and wrote to Mary Kirkwood—all the time with the fear that my letters were not reaching her, but also with the unshakable conviction that she was mine. You smile at this as proof of my colossal vanity. Well, your smile convicts you of never having loved. The essence of love is congeniality. Appetite is the essence of passion—which, therefore, has no sense of or especial desire for mutuality. Passion is as common as any other physical appetite. Love is as rare as are souls generous enough to experience or to inspire it. The essence of love is congeniality—and I *knew* there was a sympathy and understanding between me and Mary Kirkwood that made us lovers for all time.

There came a day—how it burned into my memory!—when Edna was well enough to talk with me. Several

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

days beforehand I saw that it was not far away, and I awaited it with fierce impatience; she would tell me why she had sent for me and I should be free to go. It was one of those soft gray days of alternating rain and sun that are the specialty of the British climate. Edna, with flowers everywhere in her sitting room, was half reclining in an invalid chair, all manner of rich, delicate silk and lace assistants to comfort, luxury and beauty adorning her or forming background for her lovely face and head. I do not think there is a detail of the room or of her appearance that I could not reproduce, though at the time I was unaware of anything but her voice—her words.

I entered, seated myself in the broad low window opposite her. She looked at me a long time, a strange soft expression in her weary eyes—an expression that disquieted me. At last she said:

“It is so good to be getting well.”

“And you are getting well rapidly,” I said. “You have a wonderful constitution.”

“You are glad I am better, Godfrey?”

I laughed. “What a foolish question.”

“I didn’t know,” said she. “I feared— I have acted so badly toward you.”

“No indeed,” replied I. “Don’t worry about those things. I hope you feel as friendly toward me as I do toward you.”

“But you have always been good to me—even when I haven’t deserved it.”

This was most puzzling. Said I vaguely, “I guess we’ve both done the best we could. Do you want to

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

tell me to-day why you sent for me? Or don't you feel strong enough?"

"Yes—I wish to tell you to-day. But—it isn't easy to say. I'm very proud, Godfrey—and when I've been in the wrong it's hard for me to admit."

"Oh, come now, Edna," said I soothingly. "Let's not rake up the past. It's finished—and it has left no hard feeling—at least not in me. Don't think of anything but of getting well."

She lay gazing out into the gentle rain with the sunshine glistening upon it. A few large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"There's nothing to be unhappy about," said I. "You are far on the way to health. You are as lovely as ever. And you will get everything you want."

"Oh, it's so hard to tell you!" she sighed.

"Then don't," I urged. "If there's anything I can do for you, let me know. I'll be glad to do it."

She covered her eyes with her thin, beautiful hand. "Love me—love me, Godfrey—as you used to," she sobbed.

I was dumfounded. It seemed to me I could not have heard aright. I stared at her until she lowered her hand and looked at me. Then I hastily glanced away.

"I'm sorry for the way I've acted," she went on. "I want you to take me back. That was why I sent for you."

I puzzled over this. Was she still out of her mind? Or was there some other and sane—and extremely practical—reason behind this strange turn?—for I could

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

not for an instant imagine she was in sane and sober earnest.

"You don't believe me!" she cried. "No wonder. But it's so, Godfrey. I want your love—I want *you*. Won't you—won't you—take me—back?"

Her voice sounded pitifully sick and weak; and when I looked at her I could not but see that to refuse to humor her would be to endanger her life. I said:

"Edna, this is an utter surprise for me—about the last thing I expected. I can't grasp it—so suddenly. I—I— Do you really mean it?"

"I really mean it, dear," she said earnestly.

It was evident she, in her secret heart, was taking it for granted that her news would be welcome to me; that all she had to do in order to win me back as her devoted, enslaved husband was to announce her willingness to come. I have often marveled at this peculiar vanity of women—their deep, abiding belief in the power of their own charms—the all but impossibility of a man's ever convincing a woman that he does not love her. They say hope is the hardest of human emotions. I doubt it. I think vanity, especially the sex vanity both of men and of women, is far and away harder than even hope. I saw she was assuming I would be delighted, deeply grateful, ardently responsive as soon as I should grasp the dazzling glad tidings. And she so ill and weak that I dared not speak at all frankly to her.

She stretched out her hand for mine. I slowly took it, held it listlessly. I did not know what to do—what to say.



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"It is so good to have you again, dear," she murmured. "Aren't you going to kiss me?"

"I don't understand," I muttered, dropping her hand and standing up to gaze out over the gardens. "I am stunned."

"I've been cruel to you," she said with gracious humility. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive. But—" There I halted.

"I'll make up for it, dear," she went on, sweetly gracious. "I'm not surprised that you are stunned. You didn't realize how I loved you. I didn't myself. I couldn't believe at first when I found out."

"You are not strong enough to talk about these things to-day," said I. "We'll wait until——"

She interrupted my hesitating speech with a laugh full of gentle gayety. "You're quite wrong," said she. "I'm not out of my mind. I mean it, dear—and more. Oh, we shall be *so* happy! You've been far too modest about yourself. You don't appreciate what a fascinating man you are."

I'm sure I reddened violently. I sat, rose, sat again. "You've given me the shock of my life," said I, with an embarrassed laugh. "I'll have to think this over." I rose.

"No—don't go yet," said she, with the graciousness of a princess granting a longer interview. "Let me tell you all about it."

"Not to-day," I pleaded. "You must be careful. You mustn't overtax yourself."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Oh, but *this* does me good. Sit near me, Godfrey, and hold my hand while I tell you."

I felt like one closeted with an insane person and compelled to humor his caprices. I obediently shifted to a seat near her and took her hand.

"You could never guess how it came about," she went on.

As she was looking inquiringly at me, I said, "No."

"It was very strange. For the first few weeks after the divorce—no, not the divorce—but the decree—for it isn't a divorce yet, thank God!—for the first weeks I was happy—or thought I was. I went early and late. I had never been so gay. I acted like a girl just launched in society. I was in ecstasies over my freedom. Do you mind, dear? Does it hurt you for me to say these things?"

"No—no," said I. "Go on."

"How queer you are! But I suppose you are dazed, poor dear. Never mind! When I am better—stronger, I'll soon convince you." And she nodded and smiled at me. "Poor dear! How cruel I have been!"

"Yes—we'll wait till you are stronger," stammered I, making a move to rise.

"But I must tell you how it came about," she said, detaining me. "All of a sudden—when I was at my gayest—I began to feel strange and sad—to dislike everyone and everything about me."

"It was the illness working in you," said I.

She gave the smile of gentle tolerance with which she received my attempts at humor when she was in an amiable mood. "How like you that is! But it wasn't

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the illness at all. It was my inmost heart striving to force open its door and reveal its secret. Do be a little romantic, this once, dear."

"Well—and then?"

"Then—a paragraph in one of the society papers. Some one sent it to me anonymously. Was it you, dear?—and did you do it to make me jealous?"

She spoke as one who suddenly sees straight into a secret. "I didn't," said I hastily. "It never entered my head to think you cared a rap about me."

"Now, don't tease me, Godfrey, dear. You must have been making all sorts of plans to win me back."

"You read the item in the paper?" suggested I.

"Oh, yes—I must finish. I read it. And at first I shrugged my shoulders and said to myself I didn't in the least care. But I couldn't get the thing out of mind. Godfrey, I had always been too sure of you. You never seemed to be a single tiny bit interested in other women. So the thought of you and another woman had not once come to me. That item put it there. You—*my* husband—*my* Godfrey and another woman! It was like touching a match to powder. I went mad. I——"

She was sitting up, her eyes wild, her voice trembling. "You must not excite yourself, Edna," I said.

"I went mad," she repeated, so interested in her emotions that she probably did not hear me. "I rushed down to Margot. I fell ill. I made her telegraph for you. Oh, how I suffered until I knew you were here. If you hadn't come right away I'd have cabled to my lawyer in New York to have the divorce set aside—or

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

whatever they do. I can have it set aside any time up to the end of the six months, can't I?"

"Yes," admitted I, though her tone of positive knowledge made my reply superfluous.

She seemed instinctively to feel a suspicion—an explanation of her amazing about-face—that was slowly gathering in my bewildered mind. She drew from the folds of her negligee a note and handed it to me. She said:

"I haven't confessed the worst I had done. Read that."

"Never mind," said I. "I don't wish to know."

"But I wish you to know," insisted she. "There mustn't be anything dark between us."

I reluctantly opened the note and read. It was from Prince Frascatoni—not the cold bid for a break that my suspicion expected but a passionate appeal to her not to break their engagement and throw him over. I could by no reach of the imagination picture that calm, weary-eyed man of the world writing those lines—which shows how ill men understand each other where women are concerned.

"He sent me that note the day I came here," said she. "I did not answer it." Her tone was supreme indifference—the peculiar cruelty of woman toward man when she does not care.

"You were engaged to him?" said I—because I could think of nothing else to say.

"Yes," said she. Then with the chaste pride of the "good" woman, "But not until after the decree was granted. He would have declared himself in New

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

York, but I wouldn't permit *that*. At least, Godfrey, I never forgot with other men that I was your wife—or let them forget it. You believe me?"

"I'm sure of it," said I.

She gazed dreamily into vacancy. "To think," she mused, "that I imagined I could marry him—*any* man! How little a woman knows her own heart. I always loved you. Godfrey, I don't believe there is any such thing as divorce—not for a good woman. When she gives herself"—in a dreamy, musical voice, with a tender pressure of my hand—"it is for time and for eternity."

Never in all my life had I so welcomed anyone as I welcomed the interrupting nurse. I felt during the whole interview that I was under a strain; until I was in the open air and alone I did not realize how terrific the strain. I walked—on and on, like a madman—vaulting gates and fences, scrambling over hedges, plowing through gardens, leaping brooks—on and on, hour after hour. What should I do? What *could* I do? Nothing but wait until she was out of danger, wait and study away at this incredible, impossible freak of hers—try to fathom it, if it was not the vagary of a diseased mind. I wished to believe it that, but I could not. There was nothing of insanity in her manner, and from beginning to end her story was coherent and plausible. Plausible, but not believable; for I had no more vanity about her loving me than has the next man when he does not want the love offered him and finds it inconvenient to credit, and so is in the frame of mind to see calmly and clearly.

I wandered so far that I had to hire a conveyance at

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

some village at which I halted toward nightfall. As soon as I was at the house I ordered my valet to pack, and wrote Edna a note saying that neglected business compelled me to bolt for London. "But I'll be back," I wrote, at the command of human decency. "I feel that I can go, as you are almost well." Half an hour later I was in the train for London.

A letter, feebly scrawled, came from her the next day but one—a brief loving note, saying that she understood and that I knew how eagerly she was looking forward to my return—"but don't worry, dearest, about me. I shall soon be well, now that my conscience is clear and all is peace and love between us. I know how you hate to write letters, but you will telegraph me every day."

How I got through those next few weeks I cannot tell. I had no sense of the reality of the world about me or of my own thoughts and actions. Every once in a while—sometimes when I was talking with the men whose company I sought, again when I was alone in bed and would start abruptly from sleep—I pinched myself or struck myself violently to see if I was awake. Edna's letters were daily and long. I read them, stared at them, felt less certain than ever of my sanity or of my being awake. I sent her an occasional telegram, dictated to Rossiter—a vague sentence of congratulation on her better health or something of that kind. Soon this formality degenerated to a request to Rossiter: "And telegraph Mrs. Loring." Or he would say, "Shall I send Mrs. Loring a telegram?" and I would reply, "Yes—do please."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

It was obviously necessary that I should not see her before she was well enough to be talked to frankly. I invented excuses for staying away until my ability in that direction gave out. Then Rossiter, best of secretaries, divining my plight, came to the rescue. I gave him a free hand. He went too far, created in her predisposed mind the illusion that I was champing with impatience at the business that persisted in keeping me away from her. I do not blame him; he took the only possible course.

At last she was completely restored. The doctors and nurses could find no pretext for lingering, and that in itself was proof positive of her health and strength. She was having her meals with the family, was attending to her correspondence, was alarmed because she was taking on flesh so rapidly. She began offering to join me in London. When she wrote that she was starting the next day I telegraphed her not to come; and, after four more days of delay on various excuses, I went down. I should have liked to postpone this interview a week or ten days. Again I see you smiling at me, posing as madly in love with Mary Kirkwood yet able to put off the joy of being free to go to her. But, gentle reader, you must not forget that I had first to deal with Edna. And, from what you have learned of her, do you think I was wise or foolish to wish to meet her only when she could not possibly prevent candor by pleading a remnant of invalidism?

She was charmingly dressed to receive me, rushed forward before them all and flung her arms around my neck in a graceful, effusive fashion she had learned on

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

the Continent. I received the shock as calmly as I could, noting the awkwardly concealed surprise of Margot and Hugh. We had lunch; she did most of the talking—a gay, happy-hearted rattling—the natural expression of a woman with not a care in the world. And I— In spite of myself I felt like an executioner come to assassinate an unsuspecting and innocent victim. For the best side of her was to the fore, and all the unpleasant traits were so thoroughly concealed that they seemed to have been burned up in that terrible fever. I *knew* they were still there, but I could not *feel* it.

When we were alone in her sitting room, she said:

“Where’s your valet and your luggage?”

“In London,” said I.

“Oh, they’re coming on a later train.”

“No,” said I, seizing this excellent opportunity. “I’m going back this afternoon.”

She gave a cry of dismay. “Godfrey!” she exclaimed. “Isn’t it a shame!” Then, rushing to the bell, “I’ll have my things got ready. I’ll go back with you. You shan’t be left alone, dearest.”

I seated myself. “Don’t ring,” I said. “Wait till we’ve talked the matter over.”

“I see you can’t really believe—even yet,” cried she laughingly. “I must convince you.” And she rang the bell.

“When your maid comes, send her away,” said I. “Don’t order her to pack. You can’t go with me.”

She looked at me anxiously. “How solemn you are!” she cried. “Has something gone wrong in that business?”



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Nothing," said I. The maid came, was sent away. Edna moved toward me, would have sat in my lap or on the arm of my chair had I not prevented her by rising on the pretext of lighting a cigarette.

"You are very—very—strange," said she. Then advancing toward me and gazing into my face, "Godfrey, there wasn't any truth in that item—was there?" She looked like a sweet, lovely slip of a girl, all tenderness and sincerity.

"I've come to discuss our affairs—not malicious newspaper gossip," said I, fighting for my usual manner of good-humored raillery. "First, tell me what is the meaning of this outburst of affection for me? Aren't you satisfied with the settlements?"

"Oh, Godfrey, what a cynic you are!" laughed she. Then with an air of earnestness that certainly was convincing, she said: "Can't you *feel* that I love you?"

"I cannot," replied I blandly. "On the contrary, I *know* that you care nothing about me. So let's talk business as we always have."

She did not rave and vow and swear. She did not show the least excitement. She seated herself and, fixing upon me a look which I can only describe as tenacious, she said:

"Whether you believe me or not, I love you. And I shall not give you up."

My internal agitation instantly cleared away. I am always nervous about crossing a bridge until my foot touches it; thenceforth I am too busy crossing to bother about myself. "Well—what do you propose?" said I.

"To be your wife," replied she. "To show you how

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

sorry I am for the way I have acted, to show you by thinking only of making you happy."

"Yes? And what will you *do* to make me happy?"

"Look after your comfort—your home, Godfrey."

"But you don't know about that sort of thing," said I. "You know only how to make a house attractive to other people. You are far too fine for a private housekeeper."

"I shall learn," said she sweetly. "Those things are not difficult."

I smiled at this unconscious confession of incapacity to learn the most difficult of all the arts. "You will practice on me, eh? Thank you—but no. You wouldn't make me comfortable. You'd only harass yourself and deprive me of comfort—and for years. 'Those things' are less easy than you imagine. You are set in your ways, I in mine."

"You don't realize," protested she confidently. "You must be lonely, Godfrey. You need companionship—sympathy. I can give it to you now—for, I am awake at last. I know my own mind and heart."

I shook my head. "That sounds well, but what does it *mean*? Next door to nothing, my friend. You and I are not interested in the same things. We've nothing to talk about. I don't know the things you know—the social, the fashionable side of life. You don't know my side of life—and you couldn't and wouldn't learn enough to interest me. Any forced interest you might give would bore me. Pardon my frankness, but this is no time for polite falsehoods.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

The fact is we've outgrown each other. When we look out of our eyes, each of us sees an entirely different world; and neither of us cares about or even believes in the other's world. We talk, only to irritate. We are absolutely and finally apart. It would be impossible for us to live together."

She waited until I finished. I doubt if she listened. It was her habit not to listen to what she did not wish to hear. "Godfrey—Godfrey!" she cried, battling with the sobs that rose, perhaps in spite of her. "Do I mean nothing to you—I who have been everything to you? Does the word wife mean nothing to you?"

"You mean nothing to me," replied I. "And I mean nothing to you. Let us not pretend to deceive ourselves."

"But you did care about me once," she pleaded. "I am not old and faded. I still have all the charms I used to have—yes, and more. Isn't that so, dear?"

"You are more beautiful than you ever were," said I. "But—you've gotten me out of the habit of you. And I couldn't go back to it if I would."

She buried her face in her hands and wept.

"At your old tricks," said I impatiently. "It has always been your way to try to make me seem in the wrong. As a matter of fact, you lost years ago—lost before I did—all interest and taste for our life together. It was you who ended our married life, not I."

"Yes, it was all my fault," she sobbed. "Forgive me, dear. Take me back. Don't cast me off. I'll be whatever you say—do whatever you wish. Only take me back!"

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

I could not make an inch of progress toward the real motive behind this obviously sincere plea. As I sat silent, looking at her and puzzling, she began to hope that she had moved me. No—rather, she began to feel stronger in her deep rooted conviction that at bottom I loved her and had never wavered. She came across the room, dropped to her knees beside my chair and hid her face in my lap. Why is it that passion once extinguished can never light again? As she knelt there I appreciated all her physical charms; but I was appreciative with that critical calmness which is the absence of all feeling. I laid my hand on hers.

“Edna,” I said, “what is the meaning of this?”

“I am telling you the truth, Godfrey,” replied she, lifting her gold-brown eyes to gaze at me. “As God is my judge, I am telling you the truth.”

“No doubt you think you are,” said I diplomatically. “But your good sense must tell you that there’s something wrong.”

“Yes—with you,” was her answer in a sad tone. “I hoped we could begin to be happy at once. I see now that I’ve got to win you back.”

I concealed my panic behind an amused laugh. “I suppose I’ve misled you into forming this poor estimate of my intelligence where you are concerned,” said I. “You have thought all these years that, because I said nothing, I did not understand. The truth is, for many years I have understood you thoroughly, Edna. You doubt it. You say to yourself, ‘If he had understood, he would have been furious and would not have allowed me to use him as a mere pocketbook.’”

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Up she started, wounded to the quick. "Godfrey!" she cried. "How you hurt! Oh, my dear—spare me. If you had such a low opinion of me, don't tell me about it. Perhaps I deserve your contempt. God knows, I thought I was doing right. Don't be harsh with me, dearest. I am only a woman, after all."

I shook my head smilingly. "Drop it," said I. "You are entirely too strong a person to be able to hide behind a plea of weakness. I have let you use me for your own selfish pleasure all these years because I did not especially care. Also, it kept you away from me—which was highly agreeable to us both."

The anguish in her eyes, whether it was genuine or not, looked so sincere that I avoided her gaze.

"But," I went on, "I'm no longer in the mood to be used. You got through with me, as you thought, and divorced me and prepared to marry a man more to your liking——"

"Godfrey—you needn't be jealous of him—of anyone!"

I made a gesture of resigned despair. Jealous! Her vanity rampant. It had seized upon an insignificant phrase and had found what it was eagerly looking for. "I am not jealous of him," said I, "though it would be useless for me to try to convince you. Still, I repeat—I am not jealous. I was merely saying that you have cast me off, that I choose to regard your action as final, that I shall not let you fasten on me again simply because your selfishness and vanity happen to discover a new value in me. Do I make my position clear?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I see I can't convince you of what's in my heart," said she with sweet resignation. "I had no right to expect it—to hope for it. But my life will convince you, Godfrey. I shall win you back!"

I retained my appearance of calmness. But I was the reverse of calm. I appreciated that she had me in her power. So far as I could judge, she was not after more money, but was under the spell of some form of hysteria that gave her the delusion of an actual desire to love me and to be loved by me. As she had a fortune in her own right, and a large one, I was without means of controlling her. I could not compel her to stick to her bargain and make the divorce legally final; and, even if I had been so disposed I had no ground for a divorce from her unless she should be consenting and assisting.

"If you cared for another woman, I might despair," she went on. "But you don't. My heart tells me that you don't."

Should I tell her? I strangled the impulse as it was born; my common sense lost no time in reminding me of the folly of that course.

"I'll be so utterly yours, Godfrey," she went on, "that you'll simply *have* to love me."

I rose. "Let's have no more of this nonsense," said I. "Understand, once for all, Edna, the day when you can use me is past—gone forever. You are free—and so am I. We will annoy each other no more."

She faced me, her bosom heaving, her widening eyes scrutinizing me. And what I saw in them made me

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

quail. For there shone the arch-fiend jealousy. "Godfrey!" she exclaimed at last. "It must be another woman!"

I laughed—not pleasantly, I imagine. "Is there no end to your vanity?" said I.

"Another woman," she repeated dazedly. "If that weren't true you couldn't treat me harshly—you would want me back—would love me——"

"If there were not another woman on earth, I would not go back to you," said I.

But what woman would believe that of a man—especially of one upon whom she had put her private brand? She said in the same slow ferocious way: "Some woman has hold of you—is getting ready to make a fool of you."

I laughed—nervously watching her mind dart from woman to woman of those we knew.

"Ah—you can't deceive me!" she cried. "Mary Kirkwood! She has been stealing you away from me. And you, a fool like all men where women are concerned, can't see through her." Edna laughed wildly. "But she has *me* to reckon with now. I'll show her!"

"Mrs. Kirkwood is engaged to Hartley Beechman," said I.

"A nobody of a novelist," said Edna. "That's a mere blind. She's after *you*. After *my* husband—the man *I* love! We'll see!"

Again I laughed—and I am sure my counterfeit of indifference was successful. "Have it your way," said I. "But the fact remains that you and I are done with each other."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I shall set aside the divorce," said she.

"As you please," replied I, lighting a cigarette and preparing to leave the room. "If you are not content with the terms of settlement you can have more money. If that——"

"Why *do* I love you?" cried she, all softness and piteous appeal again. "You who are so base that you think only of money! What weakness for me to love you! Yet, God help me, I do—I do! Godfrey——"

"I am going back to London," said I.

She stretched out her arms, and her face was a grief-stricken appeal for mercy. "You can't be so cruel to me—your Edna."

I smiled mockingly at her and left the room.



## XII

I HAVE not been unaware of your anger and disgust with me, gentle reader, during the progress of the preceding scene. In real life—in your own life—you would have understood such a scene. But you are not in the habit of reading realities in books—real men, real women, real action. Everything is there toned down, put in what is called an artistic perspective. Well, I am not an artist, and perhaps I have no right to express an opinion upon matters of art. But I'll venture. To me art means a point of view upon life; so, I see nothing artistic, nothing but more or less grotesque nonsense, in an art that is not a point of view but a false view. But to keep to Edna and myself.

You think I should have been moist and mushy, should have taken her back, should have burdened myself for the rest of my days with her insincere and unsympathetic personality. You are saying: "But after all she loved him." Even so—what does the word love mean when used by a person of her character? It means nothing but the narrowest, blighting selfishness. She had for years used me without any thought for or of my feelings, wishes, needs. When we moved into our grand New York house she gave me as a bedroom the noisiest room in the house, one overlooking the street where the

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

rattling of carriages, cabs, and carts and the talk and laughter of pedestrians kept me awake until far into the night and roused me about four in the morning—this, when I was working with might and main all day long and needed every moment of rest I could get. Why did she give me that room? Because she wanted the only available quiet room—beside her own bedroom—for a dressing room! She said the light in the room she gave me was unfit to dress by! I thought nothing of all this at the time. It is characteristic of American wives to do these things; it is characteristic of American men to regard them as the matter of course. I cite the small but not insignificant incident to show the minuteness of her indifference to me. I have already given many of the larger though perhaps less important instances, and I could give scores, hundreds, in the same tenor. She professed to love me at that time—and she either had or simulated a very ardent passion. But that was not love, was it? Love is generous, is considerate, finds its highest pleasure of self-gratification in making the loved one happy. Such a conception of love never entered her head—and how many American women's heads does it enter? How it amuses me to watch them as they absorb everything, give nothing, sit enthroned upon their vanities—and then wonder and grow sulky or sour when their husbands or lovers tire of the thankless task of loving them and turn away—or turn them away.

If Edna had awakened to genuine love, gentle outraged reader, would she not have been overwhelmed with shame as she looked back upon her married life? Would she have come to me with the offer of her love as a queen

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with the offer of her crown? She would not have indulged in empty words; she would have tried to *do* something by way of reparation. She would not have demanded that she be taken back; but, feeling that she had forfeited her rights, she would have tried to find out whether I would consent to take her back; and if she had found that I would not, she would have accepted her fate as her desert.

In those circumstances do you think I could have laughed at her and remained firm? No one not a monster could have done that.

But the thing she called love was not love at all, was merely as I described it to her—a newly discovered way of using me after she had thought all possible use for me exhausted. Such, gentle reader, is the simple truth. Yet because I had intelligence enough to see the truth and firmness enough not to be swayed by shallow and meaningless sentimentalities, you call me hard, harsh, cruel. One of your impulsive kindly souls would have taken her weeping to his arms, would have begun to live with her. And there the novel would have ended, with you, gentle reader, all tears and thrills. For, having no imagination, you would have been unable to picture the few weeks of cat-and-dog life after the “happy ending,” then the breaking apart in hatred and vindictiveness. But this is not an “artistic” novel. It is a story of life, a plain setting forth of actualities, in the hope that it may enable some men and women to understand life more clearly and to live their own lives more wisely and perhaps less mischievously.

I went to my daughter. “Margot,” said I, “your

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

mother threatens to try to stop the divorce. It is best for both her and me that we be free. I am determined not to live with her again, for I abominate the sort of life she and you lead. If you will do what you can to bring her to her senses, I will see that you don't regret it."

Margot rather liked me, I believe. Not as a father; as a father I made her ashamed, like everything else American about her. But it was a resigned kind of shame, and she appreciated my money, my good nature about it and my services in bringing back her marquis and making possible her son the earl. I knew I could count on her active sympathy; for she would vastly prefer that her mother be the Princess Frascatoni.

My mother, Mrs. Loring; my mother, the Princess Frascatoni. Pronounce those two phrases, gentle reader, and you will grasp my meaning.

I was by no means sure she would have any influence with her mother, even though she was now the wife of one marquis and the mother of a marquis to be, with about half the high British peerage as relatives. But I was desperate, and a desperate man clutches at anything.

"I think you are right, papa," said she in her mother's own grave sweet way. "You and mamma never have been suited to each other. Besides, I don't want her away off in 'America where I never expect to be again. Some of the girls who have married here like to go back there and receive the flattery and the homage. But it seems cheap to me. I'm sure I don't care what the Americans think of me. I'm not snobbish, as I used to be. I am English now—loyal English to the core."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"This is the place for your mother, too." An idea occurred to me. "If I took your mother back with me, I would have my parents and hers live with us in a big place I'm going to buy in the country. You don't know your grandparents well?"

She was coloring deeply. She must have heard more than her mother dreamed she knew. "No, papa," said she.

"Your mother and I were disgracefully neglectful of them," pursued I. "But I shall make up for it, as far as I can. I wish you would come over and visit us."

"I should like it, papa," murmured she, ready to sink down with shame.

"They are plain people," I went on, "but they are good and honest—much ahead of these wretched parasites you've been brought up among. . . . Talk to your mother about them. Tell her what I have said."

She understood thoroughly; that is the sort of thing fashionable people always understand. "I shall, papa," said she. And I could see her putting on a fetching air of sweet innocence and telling her mother.

"And if she does not like it," continued I—"can't bear the scandal and ridicule among her fashionable friends—why, she can desert me. And that would give me ground for divorce."

"She would be dreadfully unhappy over there," said Margot.

"I am sure of it," said I, and my accent was a guarantee.

Should I see Edna again and picture our life together in the house of love she was bent upon? I de-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

cided against it. Margot's pictures might lack the energy and detail of mine. They would more than make up in bringing home to her the awful reality, as she would believe Margot where she might suspect me of merely threatening what I would never carry out. So, off I went to London—to wait.

About the hardest task in this world is inaction when every fiber of your being is clamorous for action. Yet I contrived to sit tight—for a week—for two weeks. I have always regarded myself as too impatient, too impetuous. And, beyond question, my natural tendency is to the precipitate. But looking back over my life I am astonished—and not a little pleased with myself—as I note how I have held myself in check, have confined my follies of rash haste to occasions when miscarriage was not a serious matter.

Armitage came—on the way from St. Moritz to America. As soon as I could command the right tone, I said:

“ You’ve seen your sister and Mrs. Armstrong? How are they? ”

“ All right,” replied he indifferently. “ Motoring in Spain at present, I believe.”

“ Beechman—he’s with them? ”

“ No. He’s somewhere hereabouts, I believe. I saw him in Hyde Park the other day—looking as seedy as if he were pulling out of an illness. I spoke and he stared and scowled and nodded—like the bounder that he is.”

“ You don’t care for him? ” said I, rejoiced by this news of my rival’s seediness.

“ Oh, one doesn’t bother to like or dislike that sort

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of chap." He said this in a supercilious manner—a manner he had never had in the earlier period of our acquaintance. How the inner man does poke through the surface when the veneer of youth wears thin!

"For one who despises birth and wealth and rank," said I, not without a certain malice, "you have a queer way of talking at times."

Armitage winced, changed the subject by saying: "And what the devil's the matter with *you*? You're looking anything but fit yourself."

"Oh—I'm up against it, as usual," said I gloomily.

He laughed. My pessimism was one of the jokes of my friends. But, having seen so much of the ravages of optimism—of the cheer-boys-cheer and always-look-at-the-bright-side sort of thing, I had given myself the habit of reckoning in the possibilities of disaster at full value when I made plans. Little people ought always to be optimistic. Then, their enthusiasm—if directed by some big person—produces good results, where they would avail nothing could they see the dangers in advance. But big people must not be—and are not—optimists, whatever they may pretend. The big man must foresee all the chances against success. Then, if his judgment tells him there is still a chance for success, his courage of the big man will enable him to go firmly ahead, not blunderingly but wisely. The general must be pessimist. The private must be optimist; for if he were pessimist, if he saw what the general must see, he would be paralyzed with fear and doubt.

"You're always grumbling," said Armitage. "Yet you're the luckiest man I know."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Perhaps that's why," replied I.

He understood, nodded. "Doubtless," said he. "What's luck? Nothing but shrewd calculation. The fellow who can't calculate soon loses any windfalls that may happen to blunder his way. But what's the grouch now?"

I was so helplessly befogged that I resolved to tell him.

"My late wife is threatening not to release me," said I.

He smiled curiously. "But she hasn't done it yet?"

"Not yet," replied I. "At least not up to eleven o'clock this morning, New York time."

"I don't think she will," said he.

"Why?" demanded I.

"You won't let her, for one reason," replied he. "You're as fond of your freedom as I am. And nothing on earth could induce me to marry again. When women—English women—look at me I see them fairly twitching to get me where they can make free use of me. Yes—marriage has gone the way of everything else. Business—finance—politics—religion—they've all degenerated into so many means of graft. And art's going the same way. And marriage—it's the woman's great and only graft. Our women look at marriage in two ways—how much can be got out of it, living with the man; how much will it net as alimony."

"You seemed rather positive that my late wife would not hold on to me?" persisted I.

He eyed me sharply. "You really wish to be free?"



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I am determined to be free."

"She's a charming—a lovely woman," said he.

There was doubt of my candor in his eyes. It is all but impossible for a man rightly to judge any woman except her he has tired of or for some other reason does not want and cannot imagine himself wanting. The unpossessed woman has but the one value; the possessed woman must have other values—or she has none. Armitage could judge Edna only as female, unpossessed female. Said he:

"She's a charming—a lovely woman."

"Like the former Mrs. Armitage," I reminded him.

"So—so," conceded he. "But I've always believed you were a fond husband at bottom."

"Dismiss it from your mind," said I. "You are hesitating about telling me something. Say it!"

With a certain nervousness he yielded to his love of gossip. "Prince Frascatori—you know him?"

I beamed in a reassuring smile. "My late wife's chief admirer," said I. "A fine fellow. I like him."

"He's visiting down at—what's the name of the place your son-in-law has taken?"

"He is?" exclaimed I jubilantly. "When did he go?"

"About a week, I hear."

"That looks encouraging, doesn't it?" cried I.

"It certainly does," said he. "They say he was charging round town like a lunatic up to a few weeks ago——"

"Two weeks ago," said I.

"But now he has calmed again—looks serene. I

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

had a note from him this morning. I'm positive he's content with the way the cards are falling."

The change in me was so radical that Armitage must have been convinced—for the moment. "If I only knew!" said I.

"I can find out for you," suggested he. "Your daughter has asked me down for the week end. I'll sacrifice myself, if you wish."

"I'll take your going as a special favor," said I.

"Besides," he went on, "these Anglo-American menages interest me. American women are so brash with the men of their own country. I like to see them playing the part of meek upper servants. The only kind of wife to have is a grateful one. To get a grateful wife an American has to marry some poor creature, homely, neglected by everyone till he came along. Even then the odds are two to one she'll go crazy about herself and despise him—because he stooped to her, if she can't find any other excuse. But a titled foreigner—An American girl is on her knees at once and stays there. He can abuse her—step on her—kill her almost—neglect her—waste her money. She is still humbly grateful."

"The worms have been known to turn," protested I. For, while I could not deny the general truth of Armitage's attack I felt he was whipped too far by bitterness that he, for lack of a title, could not command what these inferior men with titles had offered to them without the bother of asking.

"Not a worm," declared he. "No American woman ever divorced a title unless she was either in terror of

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

her life or in terror of being robbed to the last penny and kicked out."

"Thank God all our women aren't title crazy," said I.

"How do you know they aren't?" retorted he. "Do you know one who has been tempted and has resisted?"

I had to confess I did not.

"Then you thanked God too soon. The truth is our women are brought up to be snobs, spenders—useless, vain parasites. Their systems are all ready to be infected with the title mania."

Armitage, on his favorite subject, talked and talked. I did not listen attentively—not so much because I did not like what he was saying or because I thought him prejudiced as because I knew him to be a secret snob of the thorough-going variety. I suspected that if things were reversed, if he could get a title by marriage and a position that would enable him to swagger and would make everyone bow and scrape, he would put the eagerest of the female title-hunters to the blush. It may be just and proper to criticise women for being what they are. But let us also bear in mind that it is not their fault but the fault of their training; also that the men do no better when they have the chance to live in idle vanity upon the labors of some one else.

On the following Monday my emissary returned from Garton Hall full to the brim with news.

But first he had again to assure himself that there was no pretense in my seeming anxiety to be free. I saw doubt of me in his eyes before he began his adroit

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

cross-examination. I gave no sign that I knew what he was about; for in those cases the one chance of convincing is to submit to whatever tests may be applied. It was not unnatural that he should doubt, coming as he did direct from seeing and talking with the charming Edna. Men are habitually fools about women—not because women make fools of them but because they enjoy the sensation of making fools of themselves. That is a sensation much praised by poets, romancers, sentimentalists of all kinds; and because of this praise it has come to have a certain fictitious value, has come to be a cheap way for a man to imagine himself a devil of a fellow, a figure of romantic recklessness. There is no limit to which the passion for living up to a pose will not carry a man. Men have flung away their fortunes, their lives, for the sake of a pose; martyrs have burned at the stake for pose. So a man of experience even more than your ordinary brick-brained citizen is distrustful of his fellow men where women are concerned. And it is nothing against Armitage's intelligence, nor any sign of his having a low estimate of my strength of mind, that he tried to make absolutely sure of me before proceeding.

Then, too, there was Edna's charm. Women—I mean, our fashionable and would-be fashionable American women of all classes, from Fifth Avenue to the Bowery, from Maine to the Pacific—women are parlor-bred—are bred to make an imposing surface impression. The best of them fool the most expert man, as Edna had been fooling Armitage during those two days down in the country. A man has to live with them to find

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

them out. And often, our men, being extremely busy and kindly disposed toward their women and unobservant of them and uncritical of them, do not find them out for many years. The house is run badly, the money is wasted, the children are not brought up right. But the man lets it pass as "part of the game." He tells himself that not much but good looks is to be expected of a woman; he buries himself still deeper in his business. Then— If he is a successful man, along about forty when he has got up high enough to be able to relax from the labor of his career and thinks of enjoying himself, he tries to form an alliance for pleasure with his wife. And lo and behold, he discovers that he is married to a vain, superficial fool.

There could have been no more delightful experience than passing a few days in the society of Edna. She had educated herself, admirably, thoroughly, for show. She could have fooled the fashionable man his whole life through, for one cannot see beyond the range of his own vision. She might have fooled many a serious man of the narrow type; an excellent shoemaker might easily be misled by a clever showy jack of all trades into thinking him a master of all trades so long as he avoided betraying his ignorance of shoemaking. But your successful American man of the highest type, having a broad range of practical interests, becomes a shrewd judge of human values. Thus, the American woman who can pass for brilliant in fashionable society at home or abroad cannot deceive the American man—for long. Not when he lives with her. No wonder she finds him coarse; who does not wince when vanity is

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

stepped on or ignored? No wonder she thinks him uninteresting. A child would have an equally poor opinion of any person inexpert at catcher, marbles, and mud pies.

Armitage, in a company of titled people, his nostrils full of his beloved, stealthily enjoyed perfumes of wealth and rank, was captivated by Edna. If he had stopped a week or so, his American shrewdness might have found her out, might have seen why I could view with unruffled sleeves, as the Chinese say, the loss of so lovely and lively a companion. But, stopping only for the week end, he became doubtful of my sincerity. I measured how deeply he had been deluded when he spoke of her keen sense of humor. Woman nature is too practical, too matter-of-fact for even the cleverest of them to have a real sense of humor—with now and then an exception, of course. Edna had not a glimmer of appreciation of either wit or humor. But only I, before whom she dropped all pretenses except those that were essential to her pose—only I knew this. Before the rest of the world, with the aid of her vivacity!—What an aid to women is vivacity!—how many of them it marries well!—With the aid of her vivacity she made a convincing show not only of appreciating humor and wit but also of having much of both. At precisely the right place she gave the proper, convincing, charming exhibition of dancing eyes and pearl-white teeth. And occasionally with a pretty liveliness she repeated as her own some witticism she had heard much applauded in another and remote company. But I do not blame you, ladies, for your inveterate and incessant posing. We

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

men are determined to idealize and to be gulled, and you need us to pay for your luxury and your finery.

I let Armitage probe on and on until my impatience for his news would suffer no further delay. I said:

"I see you refuse to be convinced. So let it go at that, and tell me what you found out. Is she to marry Frascatoni?"

"As I've been telling you, I believe she is in love with you, Loring."

"But is she going to free me?"

"Unless you do something pretty soon, I'm afraid you'll lose her."

It was too absurd that he, who had lived with one of these showy vivacious women, had found her out and had rid himself of her should be thus taken in by another of precisely the same kind. But that's the way it is with men. They understand why they yawn at their own show piece; but they can't appreciate that all show pieces in time produce the same effect.

"There still remain three weeks before the day on which her lawyers must ask the judge to confirm the decree," said I. "Do you think she will have them do it or not?"

"Unless you get busy, old man——"

"But I shall not get busy. I shall do everything I can to encourage her to stay free."

"Then you'll lose her," said he. "Frascatoni is mad about her, and he knows how to make an impression on a woman. It irritated me to see a damned dago carrying off such a prize—and you know I'm not prejudiced in favor of American women."

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I want to see her happy," said I. "She will be happy with him—so, I hope he gets her." I laughed mockingly. "She wouldn't be happy with an American, Bob—not even with you."

He colored guiltily. "That idea never entered my head," protested he.

But I laughed the more. "And she wouldn't have you, Bob," I went on. "So, don't put yourself in the way of being made uncomfortable."

He had enjoyed himself hugely. Not only was my former wife most entertaining, but also Margot. She had, beyond question, been beautifully educated for the part she was to take in life. Her manner—so Armitage assured me—was the perfection of gracious simplicity—the most exquisite exhibition of the perfect lady—"note how ladylike I am, yet how I treat you as if you were my equal." Gracious—there's the word that expresses the whole thing. And she had a quantity of bright parlor tricks—French recitation, a little ladylike singing in a pleasant plaintive soprano that gave people an excuse for saying: "She could have been a grand-opera star if she had cared to go in seriously for that sort of thing." Also, a graceful skirt dance and a killing cake walk. She had an effective line of fashionable conversation, too—about books and pictures, analysis of soul states, mystic love theories—all the paraphernalia of a first-class heroine of a first-class society novel. And you, gentle reader, who know nothing, would never have dreamed that she knew nothing. You who are futile would not have seen how worthless she was—except to do skirt dances well



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

enough for a drawing-room or to talk soul states well enough for a society novel.

The more Armitage discoursed of the delights of his little visit the more nervous I became lest Edna should again change her mind and inflict me further. What he had said brought back my life with her in stinging vividness. I lived again the days of my self-deception, the darker days of my slow awakening, the black days of my full realization of the mess my life was, and of my feeling that there was no escape for me.

"I will admit, Loring," said Armitage, "that as women go our women are the best of all."

"Yes," I assented, sincerely. "And they ought to be. America is the best place to grow men. Why shouldn't it be the best place to grow women?"

He did not pursue the subject. In his heart he disagreed with me, for he was wholly out of conceit with everything American. His pose had been the other way, and he shrank from uncovering himself.

A day or so later I was crossing Green Park when I ran straight into Hartley Beechman. I smiled pleasantly, though not too cordially. He planted himself in front of me and stared with a tragic frown. I then noted that he verged on the unkempt, that he had skipped his morning shave and perhaps his bath. His stare was unmistakably offensive—the look of a man who is seeking a quarrel.

"How're you, Beechman?" said I, ignoring the signs of foul weather. "Armitage told me you were in town, but didn't know your address. Stopping long?"

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"You are a scoundrel," said he.

I shrugged my shoulders. As I was much the larger and stronger man I could afford to do it. "So I've often heard," said I. "Perhaps it's true. What of it? Why should you think I cared to know your opinion of me?"

"If I send you a challenge will you accept it?"

I laughed. "No, I never pay the slightest attention to crank letters."

"You are a coward. You will not give me a chance to meet you on equal terms."

"I'll take you over my knee and give you a spanking if you don't behave yourself," said I, and I pushed him out of my path and was passing on.

"You took her away from me," he jeered. "But it will do you no good. She is laughing at us both."

I strode away. I had heard enough to put me in high good humor.

As the end of my wait upon the anxious seat drew into its last week, I fell into a state of deep depression. Too much eating and drinking was, of course, the cause. But I had to pass the time somehow; and what is there to do in London but eat and drink?

Four days before the last, Rossiter came into my sitting room with the news that Edna was calling. There arose a nice question: Would I better send word I was out or see her? Because of my knowledge of her persistence where her interest was really engaged, I decided to see her and have done with. So in she came,

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

vivacious, radiant—dressed for a scene in which she was to be heroine, as I saw at a glance.

“Pray don’t think I’m going to repeat what I did the other day,” cried she by way of beginning. “I’m in quite another mood.”

“So I see,” said I.

“I was horribly ashamed and disgusted with myself afterwards,” she went on. “You must have thought me crazy. In fact, you did. You treated me as if I were.”

“Won’t you sit?” said I, arranging a chair for her.

She smiled mischievously at me as she seated herself. “You do know something about women,” said she. “You put this chair so that my face would be spared the strong light.” As she said this, she turned into the full strength of the light a face as free as a girl’s from wrinkles or any other sign of years. “You certainly do know something about women.”

“Very little,” said I, for it was not a time to pause and poke a finger into the swelling bubble of woman’s baffling complexity and unfathomable mystery. “You’ve come to tell me what it was you wanted the other day?”

She shook her head. She was wearing a charming hat—but her costumes were never indifferent and nearly always charming—a feat the more remarkable because she, being a timidly conventional woman, followed the fashions and ventured cautiously and never far in individual style. “You’re usually right, my dear,” said she, “in your guesses at people’s underlying

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

motives. But you were mistaken that time. I wanted exactly what I said. I wanted *you*."

"Incredible," laughed I.

"Yes—it does sound so," conceded she. "But it's the truth. I had a queer attack—an attack of jealousy. I'd often heard of that sort of thing. I fancied myself above it. Perhaps that was why I fell such a foolish victim. But I've recovered completely." And her eyes were mocking me as if she had a secret joke on me.

"It couldn't last long," said I, to be saying something.

"No, perhaps not," replied she. "At any rate, as soon as I heard of Mary Kirkwood's engagement I was cured—instantly cured."

"I told you she was engaged," said I.

"Oh, I don't mean that Beechman person," scoffed Edna. "She was simply amusing herself with him. A woman—a woman of our world—might have an affair with a man of that sort—as you men sometimes do with queer women. But she wouldn't think of *marrying* him. Marriage is a serious matter."

"Yes, indeed," said I.

"It's a woman's whole career," pursued she. "It means not only her position, but the position of her children, too."

"Very serious," said I.

"No—I mean Mary's engagement to Count von Tilzer-Borgfeldt."

"I hadn't heard of it," said I indifferently. "There could be nothing in such a silly story."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Didn't Bob Armitage tell you?"

"Not yet," said I. "But why should he?"

"That's queer," mused she. "Perhaps he thought there might be a little something in the talk about you and Mary, and that it would be well not to stir things up."

"That might account for it," I agreed.

She was studying me closely. "I believe you really didn't care about Mary," continued she. "I confess I was astonished when I first heard that you did. She's—" Edna laughed—"hardly up to *me*."

"Hardly," said I.

"But let's not talk of her. I've forgotten all that. I've come to make a last proposal to you."

She was smiling, but I detected seriousness in her eyes, in her unsteady upper lip, in her hands trying not to move restlessly.

"You don't realize what a strong hold you have on me, Godfrey. Is it love? Is it habit? I don't know. But I can't shake it off. Don't you think me strange, talking to you in this way?"

"Why shouldn't you?" said I.

"It's more like a woman who isn't attractive to men."

"On the contrary," said I. "You speak like a woman accustomed to deal with men according to her own good pleasure."

"How shrewd that is!" said she, with an admiring glance. "How shrewd you are! That's what I miss in other men—in these men over here who have so much that I admire. But they—well, they give me the feel-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ing that they are superficial. Do you think *I* am superficial?"

"How could I?" said I.

"That's an evasion," laughed she. "You *do* think so. And perhaps I am. A woman ought to be. A man looks after the serious side of life. The woman's side is the lighter and graceful side—don't you think so?"

"That sounds plausible," said I.

"But I grow tired of superficial men. They give me the feeling that—well, that they couldn't be relied on. And you are reliable, Godfrey. I feel about you that no matter what happened you'd be equal to it. And that's why I don't want to give you up."

I sat with my eyes down, as if I were listening and reflecting.

"Since you've been over here long enough to—to broaden a little— You don't mind my saying you've broadened?"

"It's true," said I.

"I've fancied perhaps you might be seeing that I wasn't altogether wrong in my ideas?"

"Yes?" said I, as she hesitated.

"Margot was telling me about some plans you had—for living on the other side. You weren't in earnest?"

I looked at her gravely. "Very much in earnest," said I. "I shall never again, in any circumstances, live as we used to live."

She sank back in her chair, slowly turned her parasol round and round. "Then—it's hopeless," said she,

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with a sigh that was a sob also. And the look in the eyes she lifted to mine went straight to my heart. "I simply can't stand America," said she. "It reminds me of—" She rose impatiently. "If you only knew, Godfrey, how I *loathe* my origin—the dreadful depth we came from—the commonness of it." She shuddered.

"Europe is the place for you," said I.

"Yes, it is," cried she. "And we could be happy over here—if you'd only see it in the right light. Godfrey, I don't want to—to change. Won't you compromise?"

"By conceding everything?" said I good-humoredly. "By becoming the bedraggled tail to your gay and giddy kite?"

"You simply won't reason about these things!" exclaimed she. "Yet they say men are reasonable!"

"My dear Edna, I don't ask you to make yourself wretched for *my* sake. And I don't purpose to be wretched for *your* sake."

She sat down again. The brightness had faded from her. She looked older than I'd have believed she could. "Well—I see it's useless," she said finally. "And as I've got to stay over here, I simply must marry again. You understand that?"

"Perfectly," said I.

"Don't you care the least bit?" said she wistfully.

"You wish me to be unhappy about it," laughed I, "to gratify your vanity."

She sighed again.

"You are content with the settlements?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Oh, yes," said she wearily.

No doubt you, gentle reader, are now completely won over to her and think that the least I could in decency have done would have been to insist on her accepting half my fortune. I had no impulse toward that folly. There is a kind of wife who can justly claim that she is the equal partner in her husband's wealth. But not the Edna kind. I had made my fortune in spite of her. Nor was I keen to give her any more money than I should be compelled; why turn over wealth to her to fritter away and to bolster the pretensions of a family of worthless Italian aristocrats?

With a sudden darting look at me, she said: "You know Frascatoni. What do you think of him?"

"A fine specimen," said I. "A fascinating man."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Fascinating enough, I suppose. But—would you *trust* him?"

"I would not," replied I. "Nor any other man. I have long since learned not to trust even myself. But I'd trust him as far as the next man—as far as it's necessary to trust anyone."

She nodded in appreciation and agreement. "I believe he genuinely cares for me," she said, adding with a melancholy look at me, "And it's pleasant to be cared about."

"So I have heard," said I.

"You never wanted anyone to care about you," said she. "You are independent of everything and everybody."

"That's safest," said I.

She did not reply. After reflecting she burst out



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

with, "You ought to have *made* me, Godfrey—ought to have trained me to your taste. Women have to be *made*."

"Even if that had been possible in this case," I observed, "I didn't know enough."

Again she thought a long time; then with a sigh she said: "But it's too late now. You're right. It's too late."

It puzzled me to note how much the world had taught her in some ways, and how little in others. But that is a familiar puzzle—the unexpected, startling ways in which knowledge juts out into ignorance and ignorance closes in upon knowledge, forming a coast line between the land of knowledge and the sea of ignorance more jagged than that of Alaska or Norway. The result is that each of us is a confused contention of wisdom and folly in which the imperious instincts of elemental passions and appetites, by their steady persistence, easily get their way.

"Since I've begun to look at these foreign men seriously," she went on, "to study them— It's one thing to size them up, as you say in America, with the idea that they're mere outsiders—acquaintances—social friends. It's very different to measure them with a view to serious relations. I'm not altogether a fool—even from your standpoint—am I, Godfrey?"

"Distinctly not," said I.

"Since I've been *studying* these upper-class men over here—I've changed my mind in some respects. I'm not a child, you know. I haven't done what I've done without using some judgment of men and women."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

She flooded me with a smile of gratitude. "I owe my judgment to you, Godfrey. You taught me."

"You never agreed with anything I said—when I did occasionally venture an opinion."

"Because a woman disagrees and scorns—it doesn't follow that she isn't convinced."

"You've changed your mind about these men?" said I, for my curiosity was aroused.

"I find a lack in them. You're right to a certain extent, Godfrey. They *are* futile—the cleverest of them. Culture gives a great deal, of course."

"What?" said I.

"It's too long and involved to explain. And you don't believe in it."

"I'm willing to," said I. "But first, I'd like to know what it *is*, and second, I'd like to know what it *does*. I've never been able to get anything but words in answer to either question."

"Well, *I* see that it gives a great deal. But I must admit that it takes away something—yes, much—strength from the mind and softness from the heart."

I was astonished at this admission from her—at the admission itself, at the fresh evidences of what a good natural mind she had. But I had no desire to discuss with her. I had long outgrown the folly of discussion with futile people. I was tempted to air my own views of this so-called culture—how it emasculated where it pretended to soften; how it discovered nothing, invented nothing, produced nothing, did not feed, or clothe, or shelter, or in any way contribute to the sane happiness of a human being; how it unfitted men and women for

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

active life, made them pitiful spectators merely, scoffing or smiling superciliously at the battle. But I refrained. I knew she believed the rôle of spectator the only one worthy a lady or a gentleman—and certainly it is the only one either lady or gentleman could take without being exposed as ridiculous. I knew that her wise observations were clever conversation merely, after the manner of futile people—that when the time for action came her snobbishness dominated her.

“I wish these men were not so—so——”

“Good-for-nothing?” I suggested.

She accepted the phrase, though she would have preferred one less mercilessly truthful.

“You can’t find everything in one person,” said I.

That kind of tame generality—lack of interest thinly veiled in a polite show of interest—kills conversation and sets a tarrying caller to moving where dead silence produces a nervous tendency to linger. Edna extended her arm, resting her hand upon the crook of her parasol in a gesture of approaching departure. Yet she seemed loth to go. She rose, but counterbalanced with:

“You know, I suppose, that it’s likely to be Frascatoni?”

I rose, replied indifferently, “So I hear.”

She stood, smiling vaguely down at the gloved hand on the crook of the parasol. “If I were only younger—or more credulous,” said she. And I knew that there was a thin, sour after-taste to the sparkling wine of the prince’s love-making. I smiled—pleasant, noncommittal.

“I ask too much of life,” said she impatiently.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"Isn't it irritating that I should become critical just as I am in a position to get everything I've longed for and worked for?"

"Those moods pass," said I.

"No doubt," said she. "Well—good-by." She put out her hand with a radiant smile. "I'll not annoy you any more."

My answering smile and pressure of the hand were friendly, but cautiously so, for I felt I was still on thin ice. I opened the door for her. We shook hands again. Our eyes met. I think it must have given each of us a shock to see in the other's face the polite, distant look of strangers parting. How easy it is for two to become like one—and when they are, how impossible it seems that they could ever be aliens. How easy it is for two that are as one to become utter strangers; the sea is wide, and its currents curve rapidly away from each other.

"Rossiter," said I—he was at work in the anteroom, "take Mrs. Loring to her carriage, please."

So—she was gone; I was free!

### XIII

Not a shadow of doubt lingered. She was gone; I was free. Her manner had been the manner of finality. Her reluctance and her sadness were little more than the convention of mourning which human beings feel compelled to display on mortuary occasions of all kinds. Beneath the crepe I saw a not discontented resignation, a conviction of the truth that life together was impossible for her and me.

My male readers—those who have a thinking apparatus and use it—will probably wonder, as I did then, that she had overlooked certain obvious advantages to be gained through refusing to divorce me. She knew me well enough to be certain I would not compel her to go to America and live with me, but if she insisted would let her stay in Europe or wander where she pleased. This would have given her all the advantages of widowhood. Free, with plenty of money, she could have led her own life, without ever having to consult the conveniences and caprices of a husband. It seemed to me singularly stupid of her to resign this signal advantage, to tie herself to a husband she could not ignore, a husband she already saw would bore her, as poseurs invariably bore each other—to tie herself to such a man with no compensating advantage but a title. Indeed,

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

so stupid did it seem that from the moment she began to waver about confirming the divorce I all but lost hope of freedom.

My women readers will understand her. A man cannot appreciate how hampered a woman of the lady class is without a legitimate male attachment of some kind—a husband, a brother, or a father in constant attendance, ready for use the instant the need arises. Our whole society is built upon the theory that woman is the dependent, the appendage of man. Freedom is impossible for a woman, except at a price almost no woman voluntarily pays. To have any measure of freedom a woman must bind herself to some man, and the bondage has to be cruel indeed not to be preferable to the so-called freedom of the unattached female. Thus it was not altogether snobbishness, it may not have been chiefly snobbishness, that moved Edna to transfer herself to a husband who would be a more or less unpleasant actuality. She had to have a man. She wished to live abroad and to be in fashionable society. She chose shrewdly. I imagine, from several things she said, that she had measured Frascatoni with calm impartiality, had discovered many serious disadvantages in him as husband to a woman of her fondness for her own way. But estimating the disadvantages at their worst, the balance still tipped heavily toward him.

I am glad I was not born a woman. I pity the women of our day, bred and educated in the tastes of men, yet compelled to be dependents, and certain of defeat in a finish contest with man.

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Though there was now no reasonable doubt of Edna's having the decree of divorce made final, I, through overcaution or oversensitiveness as to Mary Kirkwood's rights, or what motive you please, would not let myself leave London until a cable from my lawyers in New York informed me that the decree had been entered and that I was legally free. The newspapers had given much space to our affairs. It was assumed that I had come abroad "to make last desperate efforts to win back the beautiful and charming wife, the favorite of fashionable European society." Stories had been published, giving in minute detail accounts of the bribes I had offered. And when the final decree was entered, my chagrin and fury were pictured vividly.

I did nothing to discredit this, but, on the contrary, helped along the campaign for the preservation of the literary and journalistic fiction that the American woman is a kind of divine autocrat over mankind. If I had been so vain and so ungallant as to try to make the public see the truth I should have failed. You can discredit the truth to the foolish race of men; but you cannot discredit, nor even cast a shade of doubt upon, a generally accepted fiction of sentimentality. And of all the sentimental fictions that everyone slobbers over, but no one in his heart believes with the living and only valid faith of works, the fictions about woman are the most sacred. Further, how many men are there who believe that a man could get enough of a physically lovely woman, however trying she might be? Once in a while in a novel—not often, but once in a while—there are scenes portraying with some approach to fidelity what

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

happens between a woman and a man who is of the sort that is attractive to women. Invariably such scenes are derided or denounced by the critics. Why? For an obvious reason. A critic is, to put it charitably, an average man. He has no insight; he must rely for his knowledge of life solely upon experience. Now what is the average man's experience of women? He treats them in a certain dull, conventional way, and they treat him—as he invites and compels. So when he reads how women act toward a man who does not leave them cold or indifferent, who rouses in them some sensation other than wonder whether they would be able to stomach him as a husband, the critic scoffs and waxes wroth. The very idea that women might be less reserved, less queenly, less grudgingly gracious than woman has ever been to him sends shooting pains through his vanity—and toothache and sciatica are mild compared with the torturings of a pain-shotten vanity.

Edna scored heavily in the newspapers. You would never have suspected it was her late husband's money that had given her everything, that had made her throughout; for, what had she, and what was she, except a product of lavishly squandered money? Think about that carefully, gentle reader, before you damn me and commiserate her as in these pages a victim of my venomous malice. . . . She was the newspaper heroine of the hour. If she had been content with this— But I shall not anticipate.

My cable message from New York came at five o'clock. At half past six, accompanied only by my valet, I was journeying toward Switzerland.



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

Mrs. Kirkwood, I had learned from her brother, was at Territet, at the Hotel Excelsior, with the Horace Armstrongs. At four the following afternoon I descended at Montreux from the Milan express; at five, with travel stains removed, I was in the garden of the Excelsior having tea with Mrs. Armstrong and listening to her raptures over the Savoy Alps. Doubtless you know Mrs. Armstrong's (Neva Carlin's) work. Her portrait of Edna is famous, is one of the best examples I know of inside-outness. Edna does not like it, perhaps for that reason.

Mary and Horace Armstrong had gone up to Caux. "But," said Neva, "they'll surely be back in a few minutes. Count von Tilzer-Borgfeldt is coming at half past five."

I instantly recognized that name as the one Edna gave in telling me that Mary had gone shopping for a title and had invested. I had thought Edna's jeer produced no effect upon me. I might have known better. My nature has, inevitably, been made morbidly suspicious by my business career. Also, I had found out Robert Armitage as a well-veneered snob, and this could not but have put me in an attitude of watchfulness toward his sister, so like him mentally. Also my investigations of that most important phenomenon of American life, the American woman, had compelled me to the conclusion that the disease of snobbishness had infected them all, with a few doubtful exceptions. So, without my realizing it, my mind was prepared to believe that Mary Kirkwood was like the rest. When Neva Armstrong pronounced the name Edna had given.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

there shot through me that horrible feeling of insufferable heat and insufferable cold which it would be useless to attempt to describe; for those who have felt it will understand at once, and those who have not could not be made to understand. And then I recalled Hartley Beechman's jeer, "She's laughing at us both." But my voice was natural as I said:

"Tilzer-Borgfeldt. That's the chap she's engaged to just now, isn't it?"

Mrs. Armstrong, who is a loyal friend, flushed angrily. "Mary isn't that sort, and you know it, for you've known her a long time."

"Then she's not engaged to him?" said I.

"Yes, she is," replied Neva. "And if you knew him, you'd not wonder at it. I don't like foreigners, but if I weren't bespoke I think I'd have to take Tilzer-Borgfeldt if he asked me."

"No doubt it's a first-class title," said I.

"You know perfectly well, Godfrey Loring, that I don't mean the title." She happened to glance toward the entrance to the garden. "Here he comes now. You'll judge for yourself."

Advancing toward us was a big, happy blond man of the pattern from which nine out of ten German upper-class men are cut. He had the expression of simple, unaffected joy natural to a big, healthy, happy blond youth looking forward to seeing his best girl. He had youth, good looks, unusual personal magnetism—and you will imagine what effect this produced upon my mood. I could not deny that Neva was right. Without a title this man would have all the chances in his favor when

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

he went courting. He had not a trace of aristocratic futility.

You would have admired the frank cordiality of my greeting. Instead of sitting down again I glanced at my watch and said:

"Well, my time's up. I shall have to go without seeing Horace and Mary."

"But you'll come to dinner?" said Mrs. Armstrong.

"I'm taking the first express back to Paris," said I.

"I found a telegram waiting for me at my hotel."

"Mary will be disappointed," said Neva. "You'll give Mrs. Loring my best?"

I remembered that the English papers, with the news doubtless in it, would not reach Territet until late that evening or the following morning. But I could not well tell her what had occurred. "Good-by," said I, shaking hands. "Tell them how sorry I was. I may see you all in Paris."

And away I went, with not an outward sign of my internal state. In less than half an hour I was in the Paris express.

I stopped at Paris a month. A letter came from her—a bulky letter. I tossed it unopened into the fire. A week, and a second letter came. It was not so bulky. I flung it unopened into the fire. About two weeks, and a third letter came. I got Rossiter to address an envelope to her. I inclosed her unopened letter in the envelope and mailed it. I was giving myself an exquisite pleasure, the keener because it was seasoned with exquisite pain.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

All this time I had been amusing my idle days in the usual fashion. My readers who lead quiet lives—the women who sit thinking what they would do if only they were men—the men who slip away occasionally for a scampish holiday, and return to their sober routine with the cheering impression that they have been most fearfully and wonderfully devilish—those women and those men will regret that I refrain from details of how I amused myself. But to my notion I have said enough when I have said “in the usual fashion.” It passed the time as probably nothing else in the circumstances would have passed such tenacious hours, every one lingering to be counted. But I confess I have never been virtuous enough to be especially raptured by so-called vice. No doubt those who divide actions into good and bad, using the good for steady diet and the bad for dessert, have advantages in enjoyment over those who simply regard things as interesting and uninteresting. For, curiously enough, on that latter basis of division practically all the things esteemed by most human beings as the delightful but devilish dessert of life fall into the class of more or less uninteresting. But for the stimulus of the notion that he is doing something courageously, daringly wicked, I doubt if any but a dull fellow would perpetrate vice enough to lift the most easily scandalized hands in the world. The trouble with vice is that it is so tiresome—and so bad for the health. And most of it is so vulgar. Drinking to excess and gambling, for instance. I have indulged in both at times, when hard pressed for ways to pass the time or when in those stupid moods of obstinate unreasonableness in which a man takes a sav-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

age pleasure in disgusting himself with himself. Drinking has a certain coarse appeal to the imagination—coarse and slight but definite. But gambling is sheer vulgarity. I have been called money mad, because I have made money, finding it easy and occupying to attend to business. Yet never have I cared about money sufficiently to take the faintest interest in the gaming table. Gambling—all forms of it—is for those sordid creatures who love money, and who have no intelligent appreciation of its value. Gambling—all the vices, for that matter—is essentially aristocratic; for, as I believe I have explained, aristocracy analyzes into the quintessence of vulgarity. The two incompetent classes—the topmost and the bottommost—are steeped in vice, for the same reason of their incompetence to think or to act.

A fourth letter, the bulkiest of all, came from Mary Kirkwood. A few hours before it was delivered a telegram came from her:

“A letter is on the way. Godfrey, I beg you to read it. I love you.”

I tore up the telegram, sent back the letter without opening it. You are denouncing me as inhuman, gentle reader. Perhaps you are right. But permit me to point out to you that, if I had not in my composition a vein of iron, I should never have risen from the mosquito-haunted flats of the Passaic. Also, gentle reader, if I had been a man of the ordinary sort would Mary Kirkwood have been sufficiently interested in me to send those letters and that telegram?

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

A day or so after the return of her last letter I was seized—I can't say why—with a longing to see my father and mother and sister, on that lonely farm out in New Jersey. I had never felt that desire since I first left home, but had made my few and brief visits out of a sense of duty—no, of shame. The thought of them gave me no sensation of horror, as it gave Edna and her daughter. When I remembered them it was simply as one remembers any random fact. They did not understand me; and in them there was nothing to understand. We had few subjects for conversation, and those not wildly interesting and soon exhausted. You will smile when I say I loved them. Yet it is the truth. We do not always love those we like to be with; we do not always like to be with those we love.

There was nothing to detain me in Paris. The hours hung like guests who do not know how to take leave. So not many days elapsed between my seizure and my appearance at the spacious and comfortable stone farmhouse where the four old people were awaiting in a semi-comatose or dozing state what they firmly believed was a summons to a higher life. Their belief in it, like that of most religious people, was not strong enough to make them impatient to get it; still they believed, and found the belief a satisfactory way of employing such small part of their minds as remained awake.

I had not seen them or their place in several years, so I was astonished by the changes. My sister Polly—a homely old maid—and Edna's father had some glimmerings of enterprise. Polly took in and read several magazines, and from them gathered odds and ends of

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

up-to-date ideas about dress, about furnishing, about gardens. With the valuable assistance of old Weeping Willie she had wrought a most creditable transformation. The old people now "looked like something," as the saying is. And the place had a real smartness—both within and without.

Polly—she was about eight years my senior, but looked old enough to be my mother—Polly watched me anxiously as I strolled and nosed about. My delight filled her with delight.

"You're not so ashamed of us, perhaps?" said she.

"I never have been," replied I. Nor did I put an accent on the personal pronoun that would have been a hint about somebody else's feelings.

"Well—you ought to have been," said she. "We were mighty far behind even the tail of the procession."

"I'll admit I like this better than the way we used to live in Passaic. Polly, you've got the best there is going. All the rest—all the luxury and other nonsense—is nothing but a source of unhappiness."

She did not answer. I noted a touching sadness in her expression.

"You don't agree with me?" said I.

"Yes, I do," replied she emphatically. "I wasn't thinking of that."

"What have *you* got to be unhappy about?"

"You think I'm ungrateful to you," said she, with quick sensitiveness. "But I'm not, Godfrey—indeed I'm not."

"Ungrateful?" I laughed. "Don't talk nonsense."

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"You've done all you could—all anyone could. And in a way I am happy. But——"

"Yes?" I urged, as she hesitated.

"Well, I've found out—looking back over my life—I've found out that I— It seems to me I've got all the *tools* of happiness, but nothing to *work on*. I keep thinking, 'How happy I could be if I only had something to work on!'"

I was silent. A shadow crept out of a black corner of my heart and cast a somberness and a chill over me.

"You understand?" said she.

I nodded.

"I thought you would," she went on. "Godfrey, I've often felt sorry for you—sorrier than I do for myself." She laid her hand on my arm. "But you're a man—a handsome, attractive, *young* man. You'll have only yourself to blame if you waste your life as mine's been wasted."

"You don't realize how lucky you've been," said I, with a bitterness that surprised me. "You've at least escaped marriage."

"I wish to God I hadn't," cried she with an energy that startled me. There was a fierce look of pain in her eyes. "I thought you understood. But I see you don't."

"What do you mean, Polly Ann?" said I gently.

"The real unhappiness isn't an unhappy marriage," replied she. "It's being not married at all—not having any children. You know what I am—an old maid. You think that means the same thing as old bachelor. Well, it don't."



## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Why not?"

"An old bachelor—nine times out of ten that means simply an old, selfish, comfortable man. But an old maid—The nature of woman's different from the nature of man. A woman's got to have a home—*her* home—her nest, with her children in it. And I'm an old maid. If I'd been a man—" She turned on me. "I'm ugly, ain't I? You know I am. *I* know it. Dress me up in men's clothes and I'd be a good-looking person—as a man. But as a woman I'm ugly. If I'd have been a man I could have got a mighty nice, mighty nice-looking wife—one that'd have been grateful to me for taking her and would have cared for me. But as a woman I couldn't get a husband."

"You can get a very good one," said I. "Money—what would have bought you a wife as a man—what buys most men their wives—will buy you a husband. And he'll be grateful and loving, so long as you manage the purse strings well—just as most wives are loving and grateful if their husbands don't treat them too indulgently."

"It's different, and you know it is," retorted she. "Custom has made it different. And I'm ugly—and that's fatal in a woman."

"Charm will beat beauty every time," said I.

"I've got no charm—none on the outside. And that's where a woman's charm has to be. No, I've thought out my case. It's hopeless. I'm a born old maid. No man ever asked me to marry him. No man ever said a word of love to me. Do you know what that means, Godfrey?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

I was silent. A choke in my throat made speech impossible.

"Never a word of love," she went on monotonously. "Yet I don't suppose any woman ever wanted to hear it more. And no children. Yet I know no woman ever wanted them more. No, not adopted children—but my own flesh and blood. I've heard women complain of the burden of bearing a child. It made me wild to listen to them—the fools—the selfish fools! What wouldn't I have given to have felt a child within me. Does it scandalize you to hear me talk like this?"

"No," said I. "No."

"It's a wonder," said she, with a grim smile. She was quieting down, was hiding the heart from which she had on impulse snatched the veil, was ashamed of her outburst. "A woman can talk about having a cancer, or a tumor, or any frightful disease inside her, and nobody's modesty is shocked. But if she speaks of having a child within her—a wonderful, living human being—a lovely baby—why, it's immodest!" She gave a scornful laugh. "What a world! What a world!"

I looked at her and marveled. What a world, indeed!—where *this* was one of the sort of relatives of whom pushing arrived people were ashamed!

I think I forced myself to stay three days with them. I cannot recall; perhaps I left the second day. However that may be, I have the sense of a long, a very long visit. To one who has the city habit the country is oppressively deliberate even when it is interesting. It makes you realize how there is room, and to spare, for

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

sixty minutes in an hour, for sixty seconds in each minute. The city entertains; the country compels you to seek entertainment, to make entertainment. People whose mentality tapers away from mediocrity grow old and dull rapidly in the country as soon as childhood's torrential life begins to slacken. For men of thought the country ought to be ideal, I should say, once they formed its habit and lost the city habit of waiting in confident expectation of being amused. But for men of action like myself, for men whose whole life is dealing directly with their fellow men, to acquire the country habit is a matter of years, of a complete revolution.

I brought a sore and a sick heart to the country. I took back to town one that was on the way toward the normal. And I owed the improvement not to the country directly, but to my sister. Polly Ann had reminded me of the futility of graveyard mooning, of its egotism and hypocrisy. She had reminded me that only the fool walks backward through life. I believed I had been guilty of the folly of blowing a bubble of delusion, pretending to myself that it was no bubble, but permanent, substantial, real. The bubble had burst, as bubbles must—had burst with a mocking and irritating dash of cold spray straight into my face. Well!—the sensible thing to do, the only thing to do, was to laugh and blow no more bubbles.

I went back to finance; I busied myself to the uttermost of my capacity for work. But I could not uproot the idea Mary Kirkwood had set growing in my mind. I saw ever more clearly that my sister was eternally right. Some men might be successful bachelors. I

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

could be fairly successful at that selfish and solitary profession for a few years, perhaps for ten or fifteen years longer. But I knew with the clearness of a vision trained to search the horizon of the future that the feeling of loneliness, of complete futility which already shadowed me, would become a black pall. I *must* have companionship; and to companionship there is but the one way—the way of wife and children. A poor, an uncertain way; nevertheless the only way.

You have, perhaps, observed the marriages of the rich. You have noted that every rich man and every rich woman is surrounded by a smaller or larger army of satellites—persons nominally their social equals, often distinctly their mental superiors, salaried persons, wearers of cast-off clothing, eaters of luncheons and dinners, permanent free lodgers, constant or occasional pensioners more or less disguised. Family life fails with the rich as it fails with the well-off, or with the poor. But while other classes revert to the herd life, the life of clubs, saloons, teas, receptions, the rich take up the parasite-beset life, each rich person aloof with his or her particular circle of flatterers, attendants, coat-holders, joke-makers, and boot-lickers.

Now it so happened that for me there could be no enduring of this standing apart in the meadow, switching my tail while parasites bit and tickled, buzzed and burrowed. Riches, like any other heavy and constantly growing responsibility, usually rob a man of his sense of humor and turn his thoughts in upon himself and make him a ridiculous ass of an egotist. They had not had that effect upon me. I can give no reason; I simply

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

state the fact. So, with my sense of humor active, and my sense of proportion fairly well balanced, I could not give myself up to the dreary life custom assigns to the rich. I retained the normal human instincts.

I had hoped to satisfy them to the uttermost with the aid of Mary Kirkwood. That hope had fallen dead. I must search on—not for the best conceivable, but for the best possible.

You are not surprised at my lack of sentiment, gentle reader. By this time, I am sure, I could not surprise you with any exhibition of that or other depravity. But it confirms your conviction of my utter sordidness. So? Then you imagine, do you, that there are many love marriages in the world, leaving out of the count those in novels and in the twaddling gossip men and women repeat as the true heart stories of this and that person? Yes, I should say your intelligence was about rudimentary enough to give you such a false notion of life as it is lived. Marriages of passion there are a-plenty. Rarely, indeed, does a man become bill-payer to a woman for life—not to speak of the insurance—without having been more or less agitated by her physical charms; and usually the woman, eager to be married, whips up for him a return feeling that looks well, convinces the man and herself, and makes you, gentle reader, sigh and wipe your sloppy eyes. But love-marriage—that's a wholly different matter. I should say it almost never occurs. Where love, a sentiment of slow and reluctant growth, does happen occasionally to come afterwards, because the two are really congenial, really mated—where love does come after-

wards, it did not exist when the wedding bells rang. And I doubt not that love has grown as often, if not oftener, where the motives that led to the marriage were practical and even sordid than where they were the bright, swift fading, and in death most foul-smelling, flowers of passion.

I was willing to buy a wife, if I could find a woman who promised to wear well, to improve on acquaintance, or, at least, not to deteriorate. And, beyond question, with my money I could have taken my pick. Almost any girl anywhere, engaged or unengaged, would have fallen in love with me as soon as she discovered my charms—of person and of purse. Yes, would have fallen in love, gentle reader. Don't you know that a nice, pure girl always makes herself, or lets herself, fall in love, before she gives herself? And don't you know that, except falling out of love—out of that kind of love—there's nothing easier, especially for an inexperienced girl, than falling in love—in that kind of love?

But where was I to find a woman with enough solid quality to give me a reasonable hope that she would aid me in my quest for family happiness?

Do not denounce me, gentle reader. Epithet and hiss are not reply. Answer my question.

You say there are millions of such girls. Yes? But where?

You say there are millions of pure, sweet, charming girls, intelligent and domestic. Yes. No doubt. But how long would they remain so if tempted by wealth, by the example of all the money-mad, luxury-mad, society-mad women about them?

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

Mind you, I did not want a stupid rotter, a cow, a sitter and loungee and taker on of fat and slougher off of intelligence. I did not want the lazy slattern who poses as domestic, who is fond of home in exactly the same way that a pig is fond of an alley wallow.

You laugh at me. You say: "He is a conceited fool!—to think that *he* could attract and absorb an intelligent woman with a complex woman's soul!" Not so, gentle reader. I did not wish to attract and to absorb her. As for the "complex woman's soul," the less I saw or heard of it, the better pleased I'd be. I simply wanted a woman who would join me in being attracted by and absorbed in family life.

You are still smiling mockingly. But let me tell you a few secrets of wisdom and happiness. First—Friendship is divine, but intimacy is the devil himself—unless it is the intimacy of the family. Second—To love your neighbor as yourself, he must be and must remain your neighbor, that is to say, within hail, but not within touch. Third—Husband, wife, and children are the only natural intimates—intimate because they have the bond of common interest. The family that looks abroad for intimates has ceased to be a family. Finally—A man who has his wife and children for intimates has neither need nor time for other intimates; and unless a man's wife and children are his intimates, he has, in fact, no wife and no children. Let me add, for the benefit of—perhaps of you and your husband, gentle reader—that the only career worth having is built upon and with efficient work; careers made with

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

friendships, gaddings, pulls, and the like would better be left unmade.

You are smiling still, in your smug, supercilious fashion—smiling at what you promptly call old-fashioned trite truisms. I am not sure that, after they have been thought about a while, they would seem old-fashioned or stale. Rather, I flatter myself, they are the statement of a new philosophy of life. For the old theory with which you are confusing these truths was that the family is the *social unit*. In fact, it is not; the only *social* units are individuals—capable individuals. My theory, or rather my philosophy—for it is more than a theory—my philosophy is that the family is the *unit of happiness*. Society can—and does—get along fairly well with little or no happiness. But happiness is an excellent thing, nevertheless. And *I* wanted it.

Now, perhaps, you see why I was not looking forward with any exuberance of optimism to finding the woman whom I needed and wanted, and who needed and wanted me. Prompted by my experiences and guided somewhat by my shrewd and cynical friend Bob Armitage, I had been giving no small amount of spare time to observing and thinking about the American woman. And while I admired that charming lady and found her an amusing companion for an occasional leisure hour, I saw that she was not to be taken seriously by a serious person. She knew how to look well, how to make a good “front,” how to get perhaps a hundred dollars worth of pleasing surface results by squandering a thousand or two thousand dollars. As an ornament,



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

a decoration, as a basket of rare inedible fruit to irradiate lovely costliness, she could not be beaten. As wife to a showy plutocrat, ignorant of the art of comfortable living, as head mistress to an European noble with servants trained to maintain his state in splendid and orderly discomfort, she would do excellently well. But not for the practical uses of sensible life. She had no training for them, no taste for them, no intention of adapting herself to them, whatever she might pretend in order to catch a bill-payer.

Still, I did not despair. I dared not despair. If I had, loneliness—and heartache, yes, heartache—and my sense of present and future futility would have become intolerable. On the other hand, while there was every reason for haste—when happiness was my goal, and life is short and uncertain—I was resolved to be deliberate. If I should be deceived—perhaps by the girl's honest self-deception—into choosing wrong, how she would hate me! For not again would, or could I let a woman use me as Edna had used me. A fool is a grown-up person who has never grown up. I had grown up—had become a definite person, knowing what I wanted and what I did not want. Such persons are hated by those who try in vain to use them. My one chance lay in finding a woman with the same definite tastes as mine. Only disaster could come through the woman who might marry me, pretending to agree with me and secretly resolved to “redeem” me once she got me firmly in her grasp.

Armitage was back in New York, was eager to resume our old relations. But that could not be. I had

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

outgrown him. And he, at the dangerous age, was allowing himself to harden into all the habits of the rich class and of middle life. Despite his efforts to conceal it, I saw that he had even reached the pass where a man of property regards a new idea as a menace to society. If it is a new invention, it may make some stock he owns worthless. If it is a new social or political idea it may make his laborers demand higher wages, or in some other way affect his dividends. And, of course, whenever a man speaks of a menace to society, he means a menace to himself whom he naturally regards as the most precious and vital thread in the social fabric. Compelled by my need for ideas to occupy me in supplement to the now thoroughly familiar and rather monotonous routine of investing and reinvesting, organizing and reorganizing, I was associating more and more with artists and writers of the sort who feel suffocated in the society of the merely rich.

Material conditions force upon men inexorable modes of life. And every mode of life breeds a definite, distinct set of ideas. Men fancy themselves original because they suddenly discover certain ideas in their brains. As well might a hen who has just eaten hot bran fancy herself original because she laid an egg. The idea was not from the man, but from his material conditions—lawyer idea, politician idea, banker idea, anarchist idea, big or little merchant idea, dog-fighter idea, professor idea, preacher idea, and so on. I was fighting to escape this to me repellent molding process—and I was making headway. But poor Armitage was rapidly yield-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

ing; his struggle, I fear, had been in its best days in large part a brassy make-believe—the valor of the trumpet, not of the sword.

He was a sorry sight. His once handsome face was taking on that petty, pinched, frost-bitten Fifth Avenue expression. And he had been driven for companionship into forming the familiar parasite circle. The chief figures in it were a decaying dandy of an old New York family who had been fawner and crumb snapper all his days, and a broken-down plutocrat who had squandered his fortune on fine women, fine wine, and fine food. The dandy gave Bob the fashionable gossip; the broken-down plutocrat gave him the gossip and scandal of the giddy part of town, also the latest gamey stories; also he—perhaps both—arranged for him the peculiar pleasures of the rich man with the palate that needs strong sensations to make it respond.

Armitage was out of the question for me. Then——

I drifted into the Amsterdam Club one evening—to write a note or send a telegram—and there sat Hartley Beechman. The instant he saw me he sprang up and made straight for me. His expression was puzzling, but not hostile—still, I was unobtrusively ready. Said he in a straight, frank fashion:

“Loring, I want to apologize to you. I made a damned ass of myself in Green Park last summer. My excuse is that I was more than half crazy——”

I put out my hand. “I half guessed at the time,” said I. “I know all about it now.”

We looked at each other with the friendliness that has become the stronger by a mended break—for broken

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

hearts and broken lives and broken friendships are much the stronger if the break mends. Said he:

“One way of measuring the strength of a man is the length of the intervals between the times when he makes a fool of himself about a woman. My first came at eighteen, my next at thirty-eight. Not a bad showing, I flatter myself—eh?”

“Uncommonly good,” said I.

“And the second shall be the last.”

“Optimism!” I warned him laughingly. “Beware of optimism!”

“No. I shall write about women, but I’ll see no more of them. I’ve got hold of myself again. I’m as good as ever—better than ever, probably. But—it cost! And I’ll not pay that price again. For a while I thought it was you who had upset my happiness. Then—” He gave a loud, unnatural laugh—“That German purchase! I saw she had been simply playing with me. You know how fond women of that sort are of playing with romantic or sentimental ideas. But when it came to the test—why, she would have married only a fortune or a title.”

I made no comment. He was saying only what I thought, what I believed true. But I hated to hear it.

“I may wrong her,” pursued he reflectively. “Not altogether, but to a certain extent. I rather think the impulse to something saner and less vulgar was there—actually there.”

As he was looking at me inquiringly I said: “I think so.”

“But—nothing came of it. And there’s little in these fine impulses of which nothing comes.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Little?" laughed I. "Why, they produce the most beautiful decorative effects. Life would be barren without them. What a repulsive sight the poor little human animal would be, grunting and grubbing about, thinking always of its beloved self—what a repulsive sight if it didn't wear the flowers of high ideals in its ears—and the jewels of fine impulses ringed in its nose."

"I think it would look better without them," said he. "Less ridiculous—less contemptible."

"To you—yes. Because you're like I am—coarse. But not to itself and its fellows."

"I'm going back to the woods to-morrow," said he.

"Better come on a yachting trip to South America with me," said I.

He flushed. "Thank you—but I can't do that," replied he. "I can't afford it."

It was my turn to flush. "I beg your pardon," I said. "I spoke without thinking—spoke on impulse. You are quite right."

"A man's a fool or a sycophant who goes where he can't pay his own way," continued he. "I've come to realize that. I'll do it no more. I'll stick to my own class. I've been justly punished for blundering out of it. But not so severely punished as I should have been had my—" he smiled ironically—"my love affair prospered."

He thought for several minutes, then he said: "I wonder—when the clash came—would I have gone with her or she with me?"

I did not reply.

He pulled himself together, smiled mockingly at his

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

own folly of lingering near the unsightly and not too aromatic corpse. "I must get into the woods and breathe it out of my system. Did you see the account of the arrangements for her approaching marriage in this evening's paper? Nearly a page—and I read every line."

When he had finished his drink he rose and departed—and I have not talked with him since. He resumed his career; we all know how brilliant it is. As I have said before, I have no sympathy with the silly notion, bruited about by silly flabby people that women ruin the lives of strong men. Now and then a woman may be the proverbial last straw that breaks the camel's back. But there's a vast difference between woman the actuality, woman the mere last straw, and woman the vampire, the scarlet destroyer as portrayed in novels and so-called histories. Those mighty men, made or ruined by women—why do we never *see* them, why do we only read about them?

I resisted the temptation to follow Beechman's example and read the newspaper account of Mary Kirkwood's approaching apotheosis into the heaven that is the dream of all true American ladies. There is but one way to do a thing—and that is to do it. I had destroyed or sent back the letters; I had resisted the telegram. I could not yet bar my mind from wandering to her. But I could avoid leading it to her—and I did. So it was by accident that, the following week, I one morning let my eye take in the whole of a four-line newspaper paragraph before I realized what it was about. The purport was that the engagement between Count

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

von Tilzer-Borgfeldt and Mrs. Kirkwood had been broken off because of a "failure to agree as to settlements." This, in the same newspaper that contained two columns descriptive of the quietly gorgeous marriage of Frascatoni and Edna in my son-in-law's new house near London.

"Failure to agree as to settlements—" Faugh!

I had calmed until all my anger against her was gone and I was thinking of her as merely human, as the result of her environment like everyone else. I believed now that where she had deceived me she had also deceived herself. And I saw as clearly as in the days of my infatuation that she and I had been made for each other, that our coming together had been one of those rare meetings of two who are entirely congenial. It filled me with sadness that fate had not been kind instead of sardonically cruel, had not brought us together ten years earlier, before the world had poisoned her originally simple and sincere nature. But how absurd to linger over impossible might-have-beens! I had gone as far as I cared to go in the company of those who have made fools of themselves for love.

I believed I could trust myself with her in the same neighborhood. But I was not sure, and I would take no chance. A few days after I read of the broken engagement I departed on the yachting trip to South America.

## XIV

THERE were but two in my party—Dugdale, the playwright, and myself. A more amusing man than Dugdale never lived. He was amusing both consciously and unconsciously. A mountain of a man—bone and muscle, little fat. He had eyes that were large, but were so habitually squinted, the better to see every detail of everything, that they seemed small; and his expression, severe to the verge of savageness, changed the instant he spoke into childlike simplicity and good humor. He made money easily—large sums of money—for he had the talent for success. But he spent long before he made. I think it must have been his secret ambition to owe everybody in the world—except his friends. From a friend he never borrowed. The general belief was that he had never paid back a loan—and I have no reason to doubt it. What did he do with his borrowings? Loaned them to his friends who were hard up. If the list of those he owed was long, the list of those who owed him was longer. If he never paid back, neither was he ever paid.

He could work at sea, or anywhere else—no doubt even in a balloon. On that trip he toiled prodigiously, crouched over a foolish little table in his cabin, smoking endless cigarettes and setting down with incredible rapid-



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ity illegible words in a tiny writing that contrasted grotesquely with the enormous hand holding the pencil. He labored altogether at night, after I had gone to bed. He was always astir before me. He slept unbelievably little, probably kept up on the quantities of whisky he drank. However that may be, he was as active by day physically as he was mentally by night. He was all over the boat, always finding something to do—something for me as well as for himself.

The only terms on which Dugdale would consent to go were that I should keep him away from New York not less than two months, and that I should take no one else. I promptly assented to both conditions. It was not the first time he had put me under a heavy debt of gratitude for congenial society. We had made several long trips together, always with satisfaction on both sides. Whatever else you may think of me, I hope I have at least convinced you that I am not one of those rich men who rely for consideration upon their wealth. I believe I am one of the few rich men who can justly claim that distinction. When I ask a man less well off than I am to dine with me—or to accept my hospitality in any way—I ask him because I want him. And I do not either directly or indirectly try to make him feel that he is being honored. I would not ask the sort of man who feels honored by being in the society of bank accounts or of any other glittering symbols in substitute for good-fellowship.

You will see, gentle reader, that my list was short indeed.

It is one of the not few drawbacks of riches that they rouse the instinct of cupidity in nearly all human

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

beings. The rich man glances round at a circle of constrained faces, each more or less unsuccessfully striving to veil from him the glistening eye and the watery lip of the gold hunger. Probably you know how pepsin is got for the market—how they pen pigs so that their snouts almost touch food which they can by no straining and struggling reach; how the unhappy creatures soon begin to drip, then to slobber, then to stream into the receiving trough under their jaws the pepsin which the sight of the food starts their stomachs to secreting. As I have looked at the parasite circles of some of my friends I have often been reminded of the pepsin pigs. Some of my friends like these displays, encourage them in every way, associate solely with pepsin pigs. I confess I have never acquired the least taste for that sort of entertainment.

I have traveled the world over, and everywhere I have found men either industriously engaged in cringing or looking hopefully about for some one to cringe to them. Well—what of it?

I owe Dugdale a debt I cannot hope to repay. He, a light-hearted philosopher, made me light-hearted. He kept my sense of humor and my sense of proportion constantly active. There is a stripe of philosopher of the light-hearted variety who lets his perception of the fundamental futility of life and all that therein is, discourage him from everything but cynical laughter at himself and at the world. That sort is a shallow ass, fit company for no one but the bleary, blowsy wrecks to whose level he rapidly sinks. Dugdale—and I—were of the other school. We did not—at least, not habit-

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

ually—exaggerate our own importance. It caused no swelling of the head in him that his name was known wherever people went to the theater, or in me that I usually had to be taken into account when they did anything important in finance. We did not measure the world or rank its inhabitants according to the silly standards in general use. But at the same time we appreciated that to work and to work well was the only sensible way to pass the few swift years assigned us.

It takes a serious man to make even a good joke. A frivolous person can do nothing. That is why so many of our American women, and so many of the men, too, sink into insignificance as soon as the first freshness of youth is gone from them. Youth has charm simply as youth because it seems to be a brilliant promise. When the promise goes to protest the charm vanishes.

I shall reserve what I saw and heard in South America for another volume, one of a different kind. I shall go forward to the following spring when I was once more in New York. Edna and her daughter—so I read in the newspapers—were living in fitting estate in a famous villa they had taken in the fashionable part of the south of France, “for the health of the two young sons of the marchioness.” Frascatoni was gambling at Monte Carlo, Crossley was at his government post in London. I could fill in the tiresome details for both the wives and the husbands—and so, probably, can you. While some business matters were settling, I was turning over in my mind plans for making a systematic search for a wife.

I count on your amusement confidently, gentle reader. If you wished a fresh egg for your breakfast or a suit

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

of clothes to be worn a few weeks and discarded, or an automobile, you would set about getting it with some attention to the best ways and means. But, saturated as you are with silly sentimentalities about marriage, you believe that the most important matter in the world—the matter which determines your own happiness or unhappiness and also the current of posterity—you believe that such a matter should be left to the lottery of chance! Well, I had long since abandoned that delusion, and I purposed to establish my life with as much thought and care as I gave all other matters.

“A dull fellow,” you are saying. “No wonder his wife fled from him.”

I do not wonder that you regard as dull anything that is intelligent. To ignorance intelligence must necessarily seem dull. When any subject of real interest is brought up, some silly, empty-headed pretty woman is sure to say, “How dull! Let’s talk of something interesting.” And there will always be a chorus of laughing assent—because the woman is pretty. So I accept your sneer at me with a certain pleasure. I wish to be thought dull by some people, including some women very good to look at. But out of vanity and in fairness to Edna I must acquit her of having thought me dull—after she had been about the world.

One evening at the Federal Club I fell in with my old acquaintance, Sam Cauldwell, the fashionable physician. He was something more than that—or had been—but was too lazy to use his mind when his gift for sympathetic and flattering gab brought him in plenty of money. Cauldwell was a trained, thoroughgoing syc-

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

phant and snob. But he saw the humorous aspect of the gods he was on his knees before—and saw the humor of his being there. He knew the kind of man I was, and liked to take me aside and make sport of his deities for an hour over a bottle of wine. Also—he liked the idea of being, and of being seen, intimate with a man conspicuous for wealth and for the social position of his family—the ex-husband of a princess, the father of a marchioness. Gentle reader, if you wish to see human nature to its depth, you must occupy such a position as mine. Believe me, you are mistaken in thinking the traits you shamedly hide are unique. There are others like you—many others.

Cauldwell was perhaps ten years older than I, but being a well-taken-care-of New Yorker, he passed for a young man—which, indeed, he was. I do not regard fifty as anything but young unless it insists upon another estimate by looking older than it really is. I shall assuredly be young at fifty, perhaps younger than I am now, for I take better care of my health every year—and I have health worth taking care of. But, as I was about to say, Cauldwell had a meditative look that night as we sat down to dinner together. And when he had drunk his third glass of champagne he said:

“Loring, why the devil don’t you get married?”

I felt that he had something especial to say to me. I answered indifferently, “Why don’t *you*?”

“Very simple,” replied he. “Not rich enough. To marry in New York a man must be either a pauper or a Cræsus.”

“Then marry a rich girl,” said I.

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

"I'd have done it long ago if I could," he confessed with a laugh. "But I've never been able to get at the girls who are rich enough. Their mammas guard them for plutocrats or titles. But you— Really, it's a shame for you to stay single. I know a dozen women who're losing sleep longing for you—for themselves, or for some lovely young daughter."

"Pathetic," said I.

"I see that irritates you. Well—you needn't be alarmed. You're famed for being about the wariest bird in the preserves. And I know you don't want that kind of woman. Why not take the kind you do want?"

"Where is she?" said I.

"I could name a dozen," rejoined he. "But I shan't name any. I have one in mind. A doctor has the best opportunity in the world to find out about women—about men, too—the truth about them."

I laughed. "If I wanted misinformation about human nature," said I, "I'd go to a doctor—or a preacher. They're the depositories of all the hysterical tommyrot, all the sentimental lies that vain women and men think out about themselves and their sex relations."

His smile was not a denial. "Yes, I've been rather credulous, I'll admit," said he. "And men and women do tell the most astounding whoppers about themselves. Especially women, having trouble with their husbands. I try not to believe, but I'm caught every once in a while."

A gleam in his eye made me wonder whether he wasn't thinking of some yarn Edna had spun for him about me. Probably. There are precious few women,

even among the fairly close-mouthed, who don't take advantage of the family doctor to indulge in the passion for romancing.

"But I wasn't thinking of any confession," he went on. "Several women have confessed a secret passion for you to me—with the hope that I'd help them. The woman I have in mind isn't that sort. I don't know that she cares anything about you. I only know that she's exactly the woman for you."

"Interesting," said I.

"She's young—unusually pretty—and in a distinguished way. She knows how to run a house as a home—and she's about the only woman I know in our class who does. She's got a good mind—not for a woman, but for anybody. And she needs a husband and children and a home."

He must have misunderstood the peculiar expression of my face, for he hastened on:

"Not that she's poor. On the contrary, she's rich. I'd not recommend a poor girl to you. Poor girls can think of nothing but money—naturally."

"Everybody, rich and poor, thinks of money—naturally," said I.

"Guess you're right," laughed he. "But it *looks* worse in a poor girl."

"I should say the opposite. A feeding glutton looks worse than a feeding famished man."

"At any rate—this woman I have in mind isn't poor. That's not a disadvantage, is it?"

"Not a hopeless obstacle," said I. "By the way, what *are* her disadvantages?"

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Well—she's been married before."

"So have I," said I.

"But, on the other hand, she has no children."

"Neither have I," said I, without thinking. I hastened to add, "My only child is married."

"And splendidly married," said he with the snob's enthusiasm.

"To return to the lady," said I dryly. "Why don't you marry her yourself?"

He had drunk several more glasses of the champagne. He laughed. "She wouldn't look at *me*. She sees straight through me. She wants a man with domestic tastes. I'm about as fit for domestic life as a fire-engine horse for an old maid's phaeton."

"Well—who is it?" said I.

"I'm afraid you'll think she's been at me to help her. But, on my honor, Loring, she isn't that sort. We've talked of you. For some reason, ever since I've known her—well, I've never seen her without thinking of you. I often talk of you to her—not marrying talk—I'd not dare—but in a friendly sort of way. She listens—says nothing."

"But she is sickly," said I.

"Sickly?" he cried. He looked horrified and amazed. "Good Lord, what gave you that notion?"

"You said you saw her often."

"Oh, I see. It was her brother who had the illness."

"All right. Bring her round and I'll look her over," said I carelessly. And I forced a change of subject.

Had Mary Kirkwood been taking this agreeable, in-



## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

sidious doctor into her confidence? I did not know. I do not know. I have reasons for thinking he told the literal truth. And yet—women are queer about doctors. However, that's a small matter. The thing that impressed me, that agitated me as he talked, was the picture he, by implication, was making of Mary Kirkwood, alone again, and evidently absolutely unattached—living alone in the country as when I first knew her.

I tossed and fretted away most of the hours of that night with the result that at breakfast I resolved to leave town again, to put the width of the continent or of the ocean between me and temptation to folly. But one thing and another came up to detain me. It was perhaps ten days later that I, walking alone in the Park, as was my habit, found myself at a turning face to face with her. I don't think my expression reflected credit upon my boasted self-control. As for her—I thought she was going to faint—and she is not one of the fainting kind. We gazed at each other in fright and embarrassment, and both had the same child's impulse to turn and fly—one, of those sensible, natural instincts for the shortest way out of difficult situations that the cowardly conventionality of the grown-up estate makes it impossible to obey. But—we had to do something. So, we laughed.

She put out her hand; I took it. "How well you are looking," said I—and it was the truth.

"You, too," said she.

I turned to walk with her. We strolled along cheerfully and contentedly, talking of the early spring, of

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

flowers, and birds, and such neutral matters. I was fluent, she no less so. Our agitation disappeared; our sense of congeniality returned. Our acquaintance seemed to have jumped back to where it was before we had that first confidential talk together on the yacht. After perhaps an hour, as agreeable an hour as I ever spent, she said she must go home, as she had an engagement. On the way to the Sixty-fifth Street entrance the conversation lagged somewhat. We were both busily revolving the same thing—the matter of explanations. Now that I was seeing her again—a wholly different matter from inspecting my defaced and smirched and battered image of her—battered by the blows of my jealousy, and anger, and scorn—now that I was seeing *her* again, I could not but see and feel that she was in reality a sweet and simple and attractive woman. No doubt she had her faults—as all of us have—grave faults of inheritance, of education, of environment. But who was I that I should sit in judgment on her? I realized that I had judged her unjustly so far as her treatment of me was concerned. Assuming that she was tainted with snobbishness, assuming that her defects were as bad as I had thought in my worst paroxysms, still that did not alter the charms and the fine qualities.

“We are friends?” said I abruptly.

“I hope so,” said she. She added: “I know so.”

“Without discussion or explanation?”

“That is best—don’t you think?” replied she. “I am—not—not proud of some things I did.”

“Nor I, of some things I did.”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"I should like to forget them—my own and yours."

"I, too. And explanations do not explain. Let sleeping dogs lie."

She smiled and nodded. She said:

"The latter part of the week I'm going back to the country. Perhaps you'll spend Saturday and Sunday there?"

"Thank you," said I. "Let me know at the Federal Club if your plans change."

At her door we shook hands, but both lingered. Said she:

"I am glad we are friends again."

"It was inevitable," I replied. "We *like* each other too well not to have come round. Bitternesses and enmities are stupid."

"And sad," said she.

When we met again—at her house in the country—there was no constraint on either side. We knew that neither of us had the power to breach, much less to remove, the barrier between us. We ignored its existence—and were content.

You may have observed that I have rarely been able to speak of Edna without resentment. I shall now tell you why:

The friendship between Mary Kirkwood and me presently set the newspaper gossips to talking. Our engagement was announced again and again—the announcement always a pretext for rehashing the story of the matrimonial bankruptcy through which each had passed. But as we were above the reach of the missiles of the scandalmongers the worst that was printed produced only a slight

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

and brief irritation. This until the Princess Frascatoni began her campaign of slander.

I shall not go into it. I shall simply say that she ordered one of her hangers-on—one of the semi-literary parasites to be found in the train of every rich person—to attack Mary and me as keeping up an intrigue of long standing, the one that was the real cause of my wife's divorcing me. When I read the first of these articles I believed, from certain details, that no one in the world but the Princess Frascatoni could have inspired it. But with my habitual caution I leashed my impetuous anger and did not condemn her until I had investigated. Is it not strange, is it not the irony of fate that in every serious crisis of my life, except one, I should have had coolness and self-control, and that the one exception should have been when I loved Mary Kirkwood and condemned her unheard? After all, I am not sure that love isn't a kind of lunacy.

Why did Edna engage in that campaign of slander? Why did she say to everyone from this side the most malicious, the most mendacious things about my relations with Mrs. Kirkwood—that she had ignored the intrigue as long as she could for the sake of her dear daughter; that it had driven her from New York, had forced her to get a divorce, and so on through the gamut of malignant lying? There may perhaps be a clew to the mystery in the failure of her second marriage—as a marriage, I mean; not, of course, as a social enterprise, for there it was a world-renowned success. If the clew is not in Edna's emptiness of heart and boredom, then I can suggest no explanation. I imagine she had been hearing

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

and reading the gossip about an impending marriage between Mrs. Kirkwood and me until she had concluded that there must be truth in it—and by outrageous slander she hoped to make it impossible.

The first effect was as she had probably calculated. Mary and I avoided each other. Mary hid herself and would see no one. Armitage and I for a time kept up a pretense of close friendship, or, rather, publicly again pretended a friendship that had long since all but ceased. But when the talk both in the newspapers and among our acquaintances grew until the “at last uncovered scandal” was the chief topic of gossip, he and I almost stopped speaking. You may wonder why he or I or both of us did not “do something” to crush the absurd lie. Gentle reader, did you ever try to kill a scandal? It is done in novels and on the stage; but in life the silly ass who draws his sword and attacks a pestilent fog accomplishes nothing—beyond attracting more attention to the fog by his absurd and futile gesticulations. The world had made up its nasty little mind that the relations between Mary Kirkwood, divorced, and Godfrey Loring, divorced, were not, and for years had not been, what they should be. And the matter was settled. I think Armitage himself believed. I know Beechman believed, for he pointedly crossed the street to avoid speaking to me.

I stood this for a month. Then I went down to Mary's place on Long Island.

You may imagine the excitement my coming caused among the honest yeomanry gathered at the station—those worthy folk who peep and pry into the business of their fashionable overlords, and are learning to cringe

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

like English peasants. I found Mary setting out for a ride—through her own grounds; she was ashamed to venture abroad. I came upon her abruptly. Instead of the terror and aversion I had steeled myself to meet, I got a radiance of welcome that made my heart leap. But in an instant she had remembered and was almost in a panic.

“Please send the groom away with the horse,” said

I. “Let us walk up and down here before the house.”

She hesitated, obeyed.

The broad space before the house was laid out in hedges and blooming beds with a long, straight drive leading in one direction to the highroad, in the other direction to stable, carriage house, and garage. When we were securely alone I said:

“Have you missed me?”

“Our friendship meant a lot to me,” replied she.

“I have discovered that it’s the principal thing in my life,” said I.

We paced the length of the drive toward the lodge in silence. As we turned toward the house again I said:

“I have chartered the largest yacht I could get—for a cruise round the world.”

A pause, then she in a constrained voice: “When do you start?”

“Immediately,” I answered. “Perhaps to-morrow.”

She halted, leaned against a tree, and gazed out through the shrubbery.

“You’ve not been well?” said I.

“I never am, when I lose interest in life,” replied she.

“You will be gone—long?”

## THE HUSBAND'S STORY

---

"Long," said I. "Either we shall not see each other again for years—or—" I paused.

After a wait of fully a minute she looked inquiringly at me.

"Mary," said I, "shall we take a motor launch and go over to Connecticut and be married?"

She began to walk again, I keeping pace with her. "It's the only sensible thing to do," said I. "It's the only way out of this mess. And to-morrow we'll sail away and not come back until—until we are good and ready."

I waited a moment, then went on, and I had the feeling that I was saying what we were both thinking: "We've had the same experience—have been through the same bankruptcy. It has taught us, I think—I hope—I can't be sure; human nature learns slowly and badly. But I see a good chance for us—not to be utterly and always blissfully happy, but to get far more out of life than either is getting—or could get alone."

As we turned at the group of outbuildings she looked at me and I at her—a look straight into each other's souls. And then and there was born that which alone can make a marriage successful or a life worth the living. What is the difference between friendship and love? I had thought—and said—that love was friendship in bloom. But as Mary and I looked at each other, I knew the full truth. Love is friendship set on fire. We did not speak. We glanced hastily away. At the front door she halted. In a quiet, awed voice she said:

"I'll change from this riding suit."

And what did I say, gentle reader, to commemorate

## *THE HUSBAND'S STORY*

---

our standing upon holy ground? I did no better than she. With eyes uncertain and voice untrustworthy and hoarse I said:

"And tell your maid to pack and go to town with the trunks—go to the landing at East Twenty-third Street. Can she be there by four or five this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll see you at the bay—at the launch wharf—in half an hour? I've got to send off a telegram."

"In half an hour," said she, and with a grave smile and a wave of her crop she disappeared into the house.

At seven that evening we steamed past Sandy Hook. At ten—after an almost silent dinner—we were on deck, leaning side by side at the rail, near the bow. We were alone on the calm and shining sea. No land in sight, not a steamer, not a sail—not a sign of human existence beyond the rail of our yacht. Her arm slipped within mine; my hand sought hers. Not a sail, not a streamer of smoke. Alone and free and together.

I forgive you, gentle reader. Go in peace.



---

## TITLES SELECTED FROM GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

**THE SECOND WIFE.** By Thompson Buchanan. Illustrated by W. W. Fawcett. Harrison Fisher wrapper printed in four colors and gold.

An intensely interesting story of a marital complication in a wealthy New York family involving the happiness of a beautiful young girl.

**TESS OF THE STORM COUNTRY.** By Grace Miller White. Illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy.

An amazingly vivid picture of low class life in a New York college town, with a heroine beautiful and noble, who makes a great sacrifice for love.

**FROM THE VALLEY OF THE MISSING.** By Grace Miller White.

Frontispiece and wrapper in colors by Penrhyn Stanlaws.

Another story of "the storm country." Two beautiful children are kidnapped from a wealthy home and appear many years after showing the effects of a deep, malicious scheme behind their disappearance.

**THE LIGHTED MATCH.** By Charles Neville Buck. Illustrated by R. F. Schabelitz.

A lovely princess travels incognito through the States and falls in love with an American man. There are ties that bind her to someone in her own home, and the great plot revolves round her efforts to work her way out.

**MAUD BAXTER.** By C. C. Hotchkiss. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A romance both daring and delightful, involving an American girl and a young man who had been impressed into English service during the Revolution.

**THE HIGHWAYMAN.** By Guy Rawlence. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A French beauty of mysterious antecedents wins the love of an Englishman of title. Developments of a startling character and a clever untangling of affairs hold the reader's interest.

**THE PURPLE STOCKINGS.** By Edward Salisbury Field. Illustrated in colors; marginal illustrations.

A young New York business man, his pretty sweetheart, his sentimental stenographer, and his fashionable sister are all mixed up in a misunderstanding that surpasses anything in the way of comedy in years. A story with a laugh on every page.

---

*Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction*

---

**GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK**

---

---

A FEW OF  
**GROSSET & DUNLAP'S**  
**Great Books at Little Prices**

---

**WHEN A MAN MARRIES.** By Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
Illustrated by Harrison Fisher and Mayo Bunker.

A young artist, whose wife had recently divorced him, finds that a visit is due from his Aunt Selina, an elderly lady having ideas about things quite apart from the Bohemian set in which her nephew is a shining light. The way in which matters are temporarily adjusted forms the motif of the story.

A farcical extravaganza, dramatized under the title of "Seven Days"  
**THE FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF JOSHUA CRAIG.** By David Graham Phillips. Illustrated.

A young westerner, uncouth and unconventional, appears in political and social life in Washington. He attains power in politics, and a young woman of the exclusive set becomes his wife, undertaking his education in social amenities.

**"DOC." GORDON.** By Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman. Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.

Against the familiar background of American town life, the author portrays a group of people strangely involved in a mystery. "Doc." Gordon, the one physician of the place, Dr. Elliot, his assistant, a beautiful woman and her altogether charming daughter are all involved in the plot. A novel of great interest.

**HOLY ORDERS.** By Marie Corelli.

A dramatic story, in which is pictured a clergyman in touch with society people, stage favorites, simple village folk, powerful financiers and others, each presenting vital problems to this man "in holy orders"—problems that we are now struggling with in America.

**KATRINE.** By Elinor Macartney Lane. With frontispiece.

Katrine, the heroine of this story, is a lovely Irish girl, of lowly birth, but gifted with a beautiful voice.

The narrative is based on the facts of an actual singer's career, and the viewpoint throughout is a most exalted one.

**THE FORTUNES OF FIFI.** By Molly Elliot Seawell.  
Illustrated by T. de Thulstrup.

A story of life in France at the time of the first Napoleon. Fifi, a glad, mad little actress of eighteen, is the star performer in a first rate Parisian theatre. A story as dainty as a Watteau painting.

**SHE THAT HESITATES.** By Harris Dickson. Illustrated by C. W. Relyea.

The scene of this dashing romance shifts from Dresden to St. Petersburg in the reign of Peter the Great, and then to New Orleans.

The hero is a French Soldier of Fortune, and the princess, who hesitates—but you must read the story to know how she that hesitates may be lost and yet saved.

---

**GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th St., NEW YORK**

---

---

TITLES SELECTED FROM  
**GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST**  
REALISTIC, ENGAGING PICTURES OF LIFE

---

**THE GARDEN OF FATE.** By Roy Norton. Illustrated by Joseph Clement Coll.

The colorful romance of an American girl in Morocco, and of a beautiful garden, whose beauty and traditions of strange subtle happenings were closed to the world by a Sultan's seal.

**THE MAN HIGHER UP.** By Henry Russell Miller. Full page vignette illustrations by M. Leone Bracker.

The story of a tenement waif who rose by his own ingenuity to the office of mayor of his native city. His experiences while "climbing," make a most interesting example of the possibilities of human nature to rise above circumstances.

**THE KEY TO YESTERDAY.** By Charles Neville Buck. Illustrated by R. Schabelitz.

Robert Saxon, a prominent artist, has an accident, while in Paris, which obliterates his memory, and the only clue he has to his former life is a rusty key. What door in Paris will it unlock? He must know that before he woos the girl he loves.

**THE DANGER TRAIL.** By James Oliver Curwood. Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull.

The danger trail is over the snow-smothered North. A young Chicago engineer, who is building a road through the Hudson Bay region, is involved in mystery, and is led into ambush by a young woman.

**THE GAY LORD WARING.** By Houghton Townley. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A story of the smart hunting set in England. A gay young lord wins in love against his selfish and cowardly brother and apparently against fate itself.

**BY INHERITANCE.** By Octave Thanet. Illustrated by Thomas Fogarty. Elaborate wrapper in colors.

A wealthy New England spinster with the most elaborate plans for the education of the negro goes to visit her nephew in Arkansas, where she learns the needs of the colored race first hand and begins to lose her theories.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

---

---

---

A FEW OF  
**GROSSET & DUNLAP'S**  
**Great Books at Little Prices**

---

---

**QUINCY ADAMS SAWYER.** A Picture of New England Home Life. With illustrations by C. W. Reed, and Scenes Reproduced from the Play.

One of the best New England stories ever written. It is full of homely human interest \* \* \* there is a wealth of New England village character, scenes and incidents \* \* \* forcibly, vividly and truthfully drawn. Few books have enjoyed a greater sale and popularity. Dramatized, it made the greatest rural play of recent times.

**THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF QUINCY ADAMS SAWYER.** By Charles Felton Pidgin. Illustrated by Henry Roth.

All who love honest sentiment, quaint and sunny humor, and homespun philosophy will find these "Further Adventures" a book after their own heart.

**HALF A CHANCE.** By Frederic S. Isham. Illustrated by Herman Pfeifer.

The thrill of excitement will keep the reader in a state of suspense, and he will become personally concerned from the start, as to the central character, a very real man who suffers, dares—and achieves!

**VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES.** By Herbert Quick. Illustrated by William R. Leigh.

The author has seized the romantic moment for the airship novel, and created the pretty story of "a lover and his lass" contending with an elderly relative for the monopoly of the skies. An exciting tale of adventure in midair.

**THE GAME AND THE CANDLE.** By Eleanor M. Ingram. Illustrated by P. D. Johnson.

The hero is a young American, who, to save his family from poverty, deliberately commits a felony. Then follow his capture and imprisonment, and his rescue by a Russian Grand Duke. A stirring story, rich in sentiment.

---

---

**GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th St., NEW YORK**

---

---

---

# THE NOVELS OF GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

---

## GRAUSTARK.

A story of love behind a throne, telling how a young American met a lovely girl and followed her to a new and strange country. A thrilling, dashing narrative.

## BEVERLY OF GRAUSTARK

Beverly is a bewitching American girl who has gone to that stirring little principality—Graustark—to visit her friend the princess, and there has a romantic affair of her own.

## BREWSTER'S MILLIONS.

A young man is required to spend *one* million dollars in one year in order to inherit *seven*. How he does it forms the basis of a lively story.

## CASTLE CRANEYCROW.

The story revolves round the abduction of a young American woman, her imprisonment in an old castle and the adventures created through her rescue.

## COWARDICE COURT.

An amusing social feud in the Adirondacks in which an English girl is tempted into being a traitor by a romantic young American, forms the plot.

## THE DAUGHTER OF ANDERSON CROW.

The story centers about the adopted daughter of the town marshal in a western village. Her parentage is shrouded in mystery, and the story concerns the secret that deviously works to the surface.

## THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S.

The hero meets a princess in a far-away island among fanatically hostile Musselmen. Romantic love making, amid amusing situations and exciting adventures.

## NEDRA.

A young couple elope from Chicago to go to London traveling as brother and sister. They are shipwrecked and a strange mix-up occurs on account of it.

## THE SHERRODS.

The scene is the Middle West and centers around a man who leads a double life. A most enthralling novel.

## TRUXTON KING.

A handsome good natured young fellow ranges on the earth looking for romantic adventures and is finally enmeshed in most complicated intrigues in Graustark.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th St., NEW YORK

---

---

# KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN'S STORIES OF PURE DELIGHT

---

Full of originality and humor, kindness and cheer

---

THE OLD PEABODY PEW. Large Octavo. Decorative text pages, printed in two colors. Illustrations by Alice Barber Stephens.

One of the prettiest romances that has ever come from this author's pen is made to bloom on Christmas Eve in the sweet freshness of an old New England meeting house.

PENELOPE'S PROGRESS. Attractive cover design in colors.

Scotland is the background for the merry doings of three very clever and original American girls. Their adventures in adjusting themselves to the Scot and his land are full of humor.

PENELOPE'S IRISH EXPERIENCES. Uniform in style with "Penelope's Progress."

The trio of clever girls who rambled over Scotland cross the border to the Emerald Isle, and again they sharpen their wits against new conditions, and revel in the land of laughter and wit.

REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM.

One of the most beautiful studies of childhood—Rebecca's artistic, unusual and quaintly charming qualities stand out midst a circle of austere New Englanders. The stage version is making a phenomenal dramatic record.

NEW CHRONICLES OF REBECCA. With illustrations by F. C. Yohn.

Some more quaintly amusing chronicles that carry Rebecca through various stages to her eighteenth birthday.

ROSE O' THE RIVER. With illustrations by George Wright.

The simple story of Rose, a country girl and Stephen a sturdy young farmer. The girl's fancy for a city man interrupts their love and merges the story into an emotional strain where the reader follows the events with rapt attention.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th St., NEW YORK

---

---

# LOUIS TRACY'S

## CAPTIVATING AND EXHILARATING ROMANCES

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

---

CYNTHIA'S CHAUFFEUR. Illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy.

A pretty American girl in London is touring in a car with a chauffeur whose identity puzzles her. An amusing mystery.

THE STOWAWAY GIRL. Illustrated by Nesbitt Benson.

A shipwreck, a lovely girl stowaway, a rascally captain, a fascinating officer, and thrilling adventures in South Seas.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE KANSAS.

Love and the salt sea, a helpless ship whirled into the hands of cannibals, desperate fighting and a tender romance.

THE MESSAGE. Illustrated by Joseph Cumming's Chase.

A bit of parchment found in the figurehead of an old vessel tells of a buried treasure. A thrilling mystery develops.

THE PILLAR OF LIGHT.

The pillar thus designated was a lighthouse, and the author tells with exciting detail the terrible dilemma of its cut-off inhabitants.

THE WHEEL O'FORTUNE. With illustrations by James Montgomery Flagg.

The story deals with the finding of a papyrus containing the particulars of some of the treasures of the Queen of Sheba.

A SON OF THE IMMORTALS. Illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy.

A young American is proclaimed king of a little Balkan Kingdom, and a pretty Parisian art student is the power behind the throne.

THE WINGS OF THE MORNING.

A sort of Robinson Crusoe *redivivus* with modern settings and a very pretty love story added. The hero and heroine, are the only survivors of a wreck, and have many thrilling adventures on their desert island.

---

*Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction*

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

---

---

# B. M. Bower's Novels

## Thrilling Western Romances

---

Large 12 mos. Handsomely bound in cloth. Illustrated

---

### CHIP, OF THE FLYING U

A breezy wholesome tale, wherein the love affairs of Chip and Della Whitman are charmingly and humorously told. Chip's jealousy of Dr. Cecil Grantham, who turns out to be a big, blue eyed young woman is very amusing. A clever, realistic story of the American Cow-puncher.

### THE HAPPY FAMILY

A lively and amusing story, dealing with the adventures of eighteen jovial, big hearted Montana cowboys. Foremost amongst them, we find Ananias Green, known as Andy, whose imaginative powers cause many lively and exciting adventures.

### HER PRAIRIE KNIGHT

A realistic story of the plains, describing a gay party of Easterners who exchange a cottage at Newport for the rough homeliness of a Montana ranch-house. The merry-hearted cowboys, the fascinating Beatrice, and the effusive Sir Redmond, become living, breathing personalities.

### THE RANGE DWELLERS

Here are everyday, genuine cowboys, just as they really exist. Spirited action, a range feud between two families, and a Romeo and Juliet courtship make this a bright, jolly, entertaining story, without a dull page.

### THE LURE OF DIM TRAILS

A vivid portrayal of the experience of an Eastern author, among the cowboys of the West, in search of "local color" for a new novel. "Bud" Thurston learns many a lesson while following "the lure of the dim trails" but the hardest, and probably the most welcome, is that of love.

### THE LONESOME TRAIL

"Weary" Davidson leaves the ranch for Portland, where conventional city life palls on him. A little branch of sage brush, pungent with the atmosphere of the prairie, and the recollection of a pair of large brown eyes soon compel his return. A wholesome love story,

### THE LONG SHADOW

A vigorous Western story, sparkling with the free, outdoor, life of a mountain ranch. Its scenes shift rapidly and its actors play the game of life fearlessly and like men. It is a fine love story from start to finish.

---

Ask for a complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26TH ST., NEW YORK

---





THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

This book is due on the last **DATE** stamped below.

50m-6,'67 (H2523s8)2373

STORED AT NRI F

PS3531.H5H84



3 2106 00213 7104

